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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DEATH TRAP

A NEW MIKE SHAYNE
long adventure by BRETT HALLIDAY

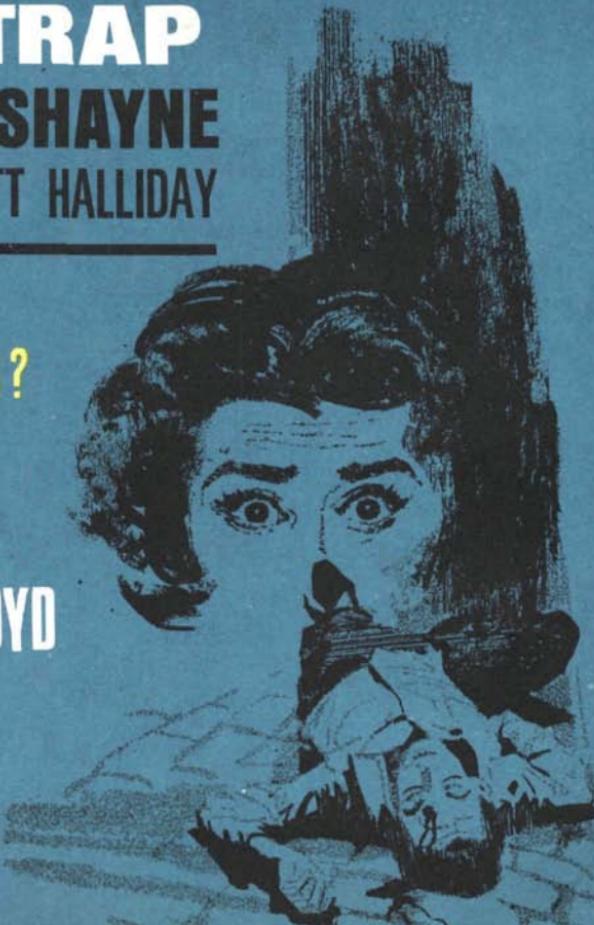
WHO'S AFRAID OF
SHERLOCK HOLMES?

By BILL PRONZINI

THE HUNT FOR
PRETTY BOY FLOYD

a new TRUE CRIME
suspense thriller

by DAVID MAZROFF



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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



APRIL, 1968

VOL. 22, NO. 5

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

D E A T H T R A P

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The luckless party girl had talked too long—and to the wrong man. Now she was dead, and Mike Shayne had to get the man who was so hot that even the Feds were afraid to touch him!

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DEATH TRAP

Men and money—these had been her life. But now she lay crumpled in death, as Mike Shayne raced against a murder deadline to avenge the luckless party girl who had talked too much, too freely—and to the wrong man . . .

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

MICHAEL SHAYNE returned to his office at 4:30 that afternoon. Lucy Hamilton looked up at him urgently and nodded her pretty head toward the inner door to his private office.

"There's a lady waiting, Michael," the brown-eyed Lucy said.

"She looks like she's in terrible trouble."

Shayne arched a ragged red eyebrow. "You're sure she's a lady, Angel?"

"I am, Michael," his secretary said, "and see that you remember it."

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THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



Shayne winked at Lucy and painted a wicked leer on his face as he walked on into his private office. When he saw the "lady" in his office the leer faded instantly. He saw why Lucy called his visitor a lady.

"Mr. Shayne?" she said nervously, trying to smile.

She looked like someone's mother—everyone's mother. A small, stout, white-haired lady of about sixty-five. Her kind, pink face was motherly; her small hands fluttered in motherly fashion; she wore a motherly print dress that had not cost much but was neat and looked good on her.

"I'm Mike Shayne," he said, as he sat behind his desk facing her, and gave her his most confident smile. "What can I do for you, Mrs.—?"

"Delany," the woman said. "Mrs. Mary Delany, and I know Sharon would never have—killed herself. No—"

Mrs. Mary Delany's voice shook as she spoke, and there were tears in her wide blue eyes. She dabbed at her eyes with a wadded handkerchief that had mopped up a lot of tears recently. Her effort to pull herself together was visible.

"Who is Sharon, Mrs. Delany?" Shayne asked gently.

"Sharon, Mr. Shayne, was my daughter. She is dead—since two days ago. She killed herself, or that is what they say. I do not believe them."

"Why, Mrs. Delany?" Shayne said. "And who says it was suicide?"

The motherly woman folded her hands in her lap and looked down. "The police, her roommate, her young man, all say that Sharon took her own life. But I know!"

Mrs. Delany's pale blue eyes looked up at Shayne. "She was much too full of life, Mr. Shayne, and her religion forbids suicide."

Shayne considered the woman. Was it refusal to believe? Probably. A religious mother and an irreligious daughter, it happened too often these days.

"What do you think happened, Mrs. Delany?"

"She was murdered, of course!" Mrs. Delany said with sharp certainty. "Murdered by those terrible people she'd been with these past months. Them and their money and immorality, and dirty power!"

"Tell me more about them? Names, for instance."

She bit at her lip. "Well, the important one calls himself Menander, Mr. Cristos Menander, but I know that isn't his real name. I swear I've seen his face somewhere, but I don't know where. Then—"

"You've met Mr. Menander?"

She nodded. "Once. I was at Sharon's apartment when they all came for a party. Everyone, even Larry and that Mr. DiDonna who owns the club. I left early, and they

were pretty quiet while I was there, but I waited outside for hours. No one came out and I could hear all the yelling and wild stuff going on."

"Who is Larry? Her young man?"

"Yes. Larry Ames. I never thought much of him either. He was the one got her into that crowd."

"And DiDonna?"

"Mr. DiDonna runs the San Simeon Club. Sharon danced in his show. She—she was a lovely girl, a good dancer. Now—"

"All right, Mrs. Delany. Now how about anyone else?" Shayne said quietly.

His quiet voice seemed to bring her back to her anger. "I don't know most of the others, except Mr. Bey, who seems to be Mr. Menander's manager or something, and a vicious young animal named Ben something. Sharon told me that this Ben someone had big eyes for her."

Mrs. Delany blushed. "Of course, that was her way of saying it. She—she had been in bad company before. I—"

"Easy, Mrs. Delany," Shayne said.

She brushed her eyes with the wadded handkerchief. "I tried to raise Sharon right, Mr. Shayne, but she was a beautiful girl at fourteen, and the boys badgered her and flattered her, and she had no father to help me. Poor Mr. Delany passed on when she was only six."

"I'm sure you did your best," Shayne said. "Now tell me why you think her friends were terrible, and just exactly who and what they are."

She dabbed at her eyes. "Well, I'm sure I don't know what they are, except that Mr. Menander is some kind of foreigner and has more money than is good for any man. He never goes anywhere alone. He lives in this mansion just up toward Palm Beach, and he is driven around in an enormous black car."

"You don't know what he does?"

"No. Something illegal, I have no doubt."

"All right. I gather Mr. Bey and this Ben are employed by Menander?"

"Yes, and a lot of others," Mrs. Delany said. "I don't like any of them. They're arrogant and mean and wild, and they all carry guns. I'm sure of it."

"Why was Sharon mixed up with them?"

"She found them exciting," Mrs. Delany said in a bitter voice. "She was only twenty-two, Mr. Shayne. This Menander got her the job with DiDonna, and there was talk about a musical show she was to star in and go up to New York."

"And Larry Ames? What about him?"

"He's a flashy young fool! Some sort of investment man, I think. He moves a lot in nightclub circles, from what Sharon told me. He has

some connection to Mr. Menander, but I don't know what."

"Just what proof do you have that Sharon didn't kill herself?"

"I told you! Besides, that room-mate of hers wouldn't look me in the eye. And something she said makes me sure that Sharon was not alone when she died."

"What's the name of the room-mate?"

"Lucille Lawson."

"Address?"

Mrs. Delany gave it to Shayne. The redhead wrote it down. He stood up and smiled at Mrs. Delany.

"All right, Mrs. Delany. I'll look into it," Shayne said, and added gently, "but the police usually know what they're doing in a suicide case. They don't make many mistakes."

"They did this time!" Mrs. Delany cried. She blinked up at Shayne and reached into her purse. "I must pay you a retainer, I believe."

"A small one. My secretary will arrange the details. One half day's work in advance will do."

"Thank you, Mr. Shayne. I want no favors, only justice!"

Shayne smiled and watched the motherly woman leave. The redhead sighed and sat down. A mother with religious scruples against suicide was probably the worst judge of a suicide in the world. He did not think that this case would take long.

Mike Shayne was wrong.

Ten minutes after Mrs. Delany had gone Shayne made an appointment to see Miami Chief of Police Will Gentry. The instant he hung up his intercom buzzed.

"A man to speak to you personally, Michael," Lucy's voice said. "Foreign, somewhere in Eastern Europe, I'd say. He sounds anxious, and I think the voice is a little disguised."

"Put him on, Angel," Shayne said.

The voice wasted no time. "Shayne? You will refrain from the matter of Sharon Delany. One warning, no more."

"Why? Wasn't it suicide?" Shayne snapped.

"You have been warned. One more word: it was a suicide, tragic and a waste, but there are those who would be annoyed by any further attention in the affair."

The phone went dead. Shayne tugged slowly on his left ear as he lowered the receiver.

II

WILL GENTRY chewed on his cigar stump and eyed Mike Shayne without expression.

"Suicide, Mike, open and shut," the Chief of Police said. "And I do mean shut."

"Shut by you?" Shayne said.

"By me, and a lot higher," Gentry said, "or at least by someone a lot wider."

"You're satisfied, Will?"

"If I wasn't satisfied, it wouldn't be shut no matter who put the pressure on, and you know it," Gentry growled.

Shayne nodded. "Sorry, Will. You want to fill me in on it?"

Gentry swivelled in his chair and faced one of his high windows. "Sharon Delany, twenty-two, Caucasian, female and you didn't have to be told. She was the kind of female who knew it six seconds after she was slapped on the rump and gave her first squawk, and she'd been using it ever since."

Gentry swivelled back to face Shayne. "It's an old, old story, Mike. Old and quick. She was a good-looking girl who slayed every boy in high school and went on from there. Too much in a hurry for college. Into the show-biz circuit. Fast company, some quick jobs, and then into big company who *did* things for her."

"And she did things in return?"

"No one gets something for nothing," Gentry said, "although there are a few special women who nearly make it. Our Sharon tied in with Larry Ames, who got her to a party named Menander, who got her a featured spot in Lew DiDonna's San Simeon Club show.

"All rosy, until the roof fell in two weeks ago. She was up for a big show, the lead, and out came the rug. No show, out of DiDonna's club, exit Larry Ames, and, so, exit Sharon the hard way."



"Pills?"

"A hard sidewalk," Gentry said. "Ten stories down. No note, no last calls. Alone in her apartment, time about four A.M., and she had a snootful of more than whisky."

"No note?"

"They often don't when they mean business."

"She had a mother," Shayne said. "She had a boy friend who you say had just dumped her. Could it have been an accident?"

"No, unless it was the half-accident kind, which I sort of figure," Gentry said. "The apartment is air-conditioned. She had to raise the window, and climb up over the conditioner. The window is never open. It took some muscle to close. I figure she got soused, maudlin, decided to play suicide in the window while she was feeling sorry for herself, and slipped off."

"No struggle? No prints on the window?"

"No signs of any struggle. No prints-except hers and the roomie's. Smudges, but anyone could have leaned on the window."

"What was she wearing?"

"Street clothes: dress, high-heels, pants, bra. She didn't need anything else."

"All right, but why the pressure, and where is it coming from?"

Gentry rocked in his chair and eyed Shayne from his dark eyes. The Chief toyed with an old switchblade he had taken from a mugger in his young days and still used as a paper knife. Slowly, Gentry shook his head.

"I can't tell you exactly, Mike," Gentry said quietly. "It's part of the pressure, that we all keep quiet. I'll say this much; it's Federal and International."

"State Department and Menander?"

"I didn't tell you," Gentry said.

"Who is Cristos Menander?"

Gentry decided to light his cigar at last. "Are you going to dig some more? No matter what I say?"

"I'm a citizen," Shayne grinned.

Gentry nodded. "Okay. Officially I don't know who Menander is, so I'll let you dig for it. That won't be hard. But the rest is. It's suicide, Mike, believe me this time, and I can't protect you against Menander unless he tries to kill you. I have a right to make him stop that. But if you bother him, and he pushes you around, I'm blind, deaf and dumb."

"That important?"

"No," Gentry said, "but I think that delicate. I gather we don't exactly like him, but we have to have him."

"His privacy will be backed by Federal muscle?"

"That's how it reads. If you bother him, be very legal. Very."

"Menander has his own goods?"

"I wouldn't know," Gentry said and scowled. "Damn it, Mike, I don't like this kind of thing any more than you do. No one is above the law. But a guy like Menander just about is, because State Department says hands off unless we catch him putting in the knife! The way it works he's not above our laws, but State and everyone else sees to it that no one, but no one, bothers him enough to tempt him to break a law. Short of murder, we wink at what he does and drop the lid."

"But this could be murder," Shayne said.

"Except it isn't!" Gentry snapped. "Mike, I practically had the leader of all good FBI men on my neck because I sweated Menander over Sharon Delany. It was put up or shut up. I couldn't put, so I shut. I'm advising you to do the same."

Gentry smoked and looked up at the ceiling. "Only you never would take advice, would you?"

"No, not often," Shayne said.

"Too bad. Well, I can't be responsible for headstrong young men, can I? Let me hear if you turn up anything fascinating."

"Then you're not sure, Will? Off the record?"

Gentry shook his head. "I'm

sure, Mike, on and off the record. But I'm not sure of her motive. Maybe there was something else on her mind—”

Gentry let the words hang in the silent air of his office. Mike Shayne got the message. Sharon Delany had killed herself, as far as Gentry was concerned, but maybe there was something bigger or dirtier behind the brodie than hurt pride and a fickle lover.

Shayne stood up. “I'll see what is happening in high circles.”

“Remember, Mike, you're on your own if you get bruised, and in trouble with the high and mighty if you bruise them. It's not cricket, or even fair, but it's the game.”

Shayne nodded and left the Chief chewing on his cigar. The stogie had gone out again.

III

THE APARTMENT of the late Sharon Delany was a tall luxury building in an elegant section of Miami. The sun of evening seemed to shine specially on its high windows. In the lobby Sharon Delany's name still shared a mailbox with the name of Lucille Lawson. Either Miss Lawson wasn't superstitious or she was very much so.

Superstitious or not, Lucille Lawson was a female. If Sharon Delany had been any better to look at the path to their door should have been made of steel. Miss Lawson was tall, dark and curved. She

was also beady-eyed as she stared at Shayne as if he needed a bath.

“Miss Lawson?” Shayne said, trying to imply that he had had a bath recently.

“Yes.” Lucille Lawson did not waste words.

“My name is Mike Shayne. I'm a private detective. I'm working for Sharon Delany's mother.”

She blinked but said nothing.

“Do I come in to talk?” Shayne said.

“Talk about what?” Lucille Lawson said.

“Sharon Delany,” Shayne said.

Lucille Lawson blinked again. “You like to beat a dead horse, Mr. Shayne? Or are you just a ghoul?”

“It all depends on how the horse got dead.”

She watched Shayne closely for a full thirty seconds. The redhead felt like a cheap menu. Then Lucille Lawson stepped back into the apartment, turned her back and walked toward the windows. Since she didn't close the door Shayne assumed she was inviting him inside. He closed the door.

She looked out the window. “So the old lady's hired a real peeper? I didn't think she had it in her.”

“She's religious, and Sharon was her daughter.”

“Sharon wasn't religious and a lousy daughter,” Lucille Lawson said with her back still to Shayne. It was a nice back, especially where the hips curved out full and

firm. "But she was a drunk and dramatic. Didn't you talk to the police? I told them all I know."

"What was that?"

Now she turned. Her face was as neutral as a face could get. Too neutral: held in and controlled. "I left Sharon about ten o'clock that night. She was hitting the bottle and feeling sorry for herself. Alternating between crying and being mad at the world. When I got back she was dead and gone. The cops were here. I told them she probably climbed up on the window in a moment of 'to hell with the world' and slipped off. Period."

"So you don't think it was actually suicide?"

Lucille Lawson shrugged. "It was suicide by accident, that's my guess. She climbed up to jump, but I don't think she would have really jumped unless she slipped. On the other hand, maybe she did jump. She was out of the show, out of Larry, and maybe out of the club next."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why was she out of the show, out of Larry, and maybe out of the club next?"

"How the hell do I know?" she snapped, but her eyes flickered and her cheek twitched. Lucille Lawson was holding herself under tight control for some reason—like a person with a gun aimed at her from somewhere.

"Come on, Lucille," Shayne

said. "Roommates talk, especially female roomies. It's half the reason for rooming with another girl, right?"

"You're telling the story."

"Did Sharon do something to get Menander down on her?"

"I don't know!" she cried. She cried it too fast and too loud, and her cheek twitched wildly.

"So you know Menander?"

"I've seen him."

"You wouldn't be taking Sharon's place with Menander, would you?"

She reddened. "I don't have to stand here and listen to insinuations from a cheap shamus."

"I guess you don't. Call the cops," Shayne said. "Only the Chief is a friend of mine, and he knows I'm here. As long as I stay in line, I can look around."

"I see. Then look around. Nothing says I have to talk to you. Sharon killed herself, in or out of her right mind, and that's all there is."

Shayne watched her stalk off into another room. It had been a good speech, but a little bit too good.

Lucille Lawson had the speech on the tip of her tongue because she had something else very much on her mind.

After the Lawson girl had gone, Shayne went to the window and studied it. As Gentry had said, simple accident was out. The window was closed. Shayne raised it.

It did not go up easily, but a woman could have raised it.

Shayne leaned out. The drop was sheer, but there was a wide ledge outside where a drunken woman could have stood in maudlin heroics, pretending suicide, and then slipping and making it all come true.

Shayne's eyes peered at the wide ledge. He looked closely. There were faint dark marks. Long marks that had been scrubbed at. Shayne frowned. They were the marks of something, probably black shoes, being dragged across the ledge, and someone had worked hard to remove them.

He came back inside and looked at the air-conditioner. There were a few small scratches on the top of it. Nothing out of the ordinary to a casual eye.

Shayne bent and pulled back the rug that covered the floor up to the air-conditioner. The rug was out of place by a foot or so—too close to the air-conditioner. Underneath, where the rug should not have been, there were deep scratches in the wood. They were the kind of scratches that conceivably could be made by the steel spike heels of a woman's high-heeled shoes.

Shayne returned the rug to its place and stood with his grey eyes brooding. It wasn't much, but what he had found could indicate a small struggle, or at least something being dragged to the window. He



turned and called to Lucille Lawson. She appeared in the doorway wearing a thin red wrapper that hid little of her. With her hair down she looked younger, more vulnerable.

"Well?" she said.

"What is it, Lucille? Are you scared? Have they got a gun on you?" Shayne said.

"Go to hell!"

Her face was suddenly white. Shayne watched her. She did not move. Her voice was toneless:

"Sharon's dead. She killed herself."

"Tell me where I find Larry Ames?" Shayne said.

"He lives at two-twenty-two Flamingo Road, The Flamingo Arms, Miami Beach, U.S.A., and Sharon killed herself," Lucille Lawson said.

Shayne left her still in the doorway into what had to be her bedroom. He had the feeling that she would stand there as long as he was in the apartment, repeating her words about Sharon Delany over and over like a parrot.

IV

THE SUN WAS almost gone when Mike Shayne returned to his office. The door was locked and Lucy Hamilton had gone home. Shayne let himself in, went into his private office, and picked up the telephone. He dialed the number of the Miami Daily News and asked for his friend, Tim Rourke.

"What's up, Mike?" the lean reporter said.

"I need a little help on an identification, Tim."

"Shoot."

"There's a party around town by the name of Cristos Menander. A foreigner and something important. He travels guarded and with an army, from the sound of it. A certain Mr. Bey seems to be high in the entourage."

There was a silence, then Rourke said, "It rings a small bell, but I'll have to check."

"Get some pics if you can. I'd like to know what they look like."

"Will do," Rourke said.

Shayne hung up and called information for the phone number of Larry Ames. He dialed the number. There was no answer. He called The San Simeon Club. Mr. DiDonna was not in yet.

Shayne went to dinner. He ate alone and slowly enough to enjoy the meal. The paella was perfect, but the wine was too sweet. He finished with a Remy Martin and coffee, and then tried Ames and

DiDonna again. He got no answer at Ames's place, and DiDonna was still not at his club.

Shayne got into his car and drove to the Daily News building. He found Rourke in his office. The elongated reporter waved Shayne to a seat.

"The boys are working on it, I expect them any minute," Rourke said. "This Menander is a bigshot, right?"

"So I'm told, Tim," Shayne said.

"It's boiling around in my head, just out of reach. He bought a plush place just north, I seem to remember, and he's political as hell. Only the Menander doesn't click. If it's a phony name, it's not one he uses a lot."

"He's using it now. What do you remember about a Sharon Delany?"

"Showgirl suicide, a looker: Two days ago. Worked at Lew DiDonna's trap, except he said he fired her that night. Big one-day story with pics, fast fadeout. Is Menander connected?"

"He's connected," Shayne said. "Only I don't know how yet."

After that the two men waited in silence. Six minutes later a copy boy arrived with a morgue file. It was a thick one. Tim Rourke weighed it in his hand and whistled. The reporter whistled louder when he opened the file.

"Damn, sure! Josip Mercori, the Foreign Minister of that little country near Greece they kicked out

about a year ago! Remember, Mike? It was a big story because he got out one jump ahead of a firing squad with half the national treasury."

Shayne nodded. "I remember, Tim. We're not sure we like him, but we had to give him political asylum. He's got all the money there is, and he rides high."

"Right," Rourke said. "We especially don't want anything to happen to him because he is more-or-less against us and the other side would make a hell of a stink about it."

Rourke read the file. "It looks like he's really nothing but a bandit playing all sides against the middle, but we're stuck with him."

"Is there a pic?"

"Plenty," Rourke said, and handed Shayne some cuts.

Shayne studied the pics. They showed a small, slender man with deep-set dark eyes, a small sneer, and a sharp nose like a scimitar. The Levantine eyes were both shrewd and cruel. Josip Mercori, alias Cristos Menander, looked like a man it would be dangerous to cross.

"What about the rest of the crew?" Shayne asked.

Rourke shook his head. "Nothing, except a few names as being with Mercori. It looks like he's the wheel, and wants to keep it that way. And no mention of any aliases, Mike, or of where he is living in the States. All these stories are

either international or about visits to Miami."

Shayne rubbed his chin. "So he likes publicity, but he doesn't want to be too exposed. I wonder if Sharon Delany made some kind of mistake in front of the wrong people?"

Rourke closed the file and watched Shayne. "You think maybe there's more to the Delany suicide than we know, Mike?" he asked.

"Could be," Shayne said.

The lean reporter's nostrils quivered like a bloodhound who just got the scent. "A story? Big?"

"I don't know, Tim. I know that Will Gentry wouldn't hide a murder, or sit on any doubts. On the other hand—"

"On the other hand?" Rourke said eagerly. The reporter's eyes had the glow of a news hawk on the trail.

Shayne scowled. "It's possible that the State boys would hold out on Gentry, Tim. They have a different problem. I'm not saying they'd wink at murder, but they might not want to dig too deep."

"What are you going to do?" Rourke asked.

"Dig a little deeper," Shayne said grimly.

"Let me in on what you find if it's interesting."

Shayne stood up. "I will, Tim, and thanks."

The detective left his friend studying the Mercori-Menander file again. Shayne stopped at a pay

phone. Larry Ames still did not answer, Lew DiDonna did.

"Yeah, I know you, Shayne," the nightclub owner said over the phone. "What do you want?"

"A little conversation, DiDonna," Shayne said.

"I always like to talk," DiDonna said quietly. "What about?"

"I'll tell you when I get there."

"Okay, but make it about eleven tonight. I'm tied up until then."

"Eleven," Shayne said.

In his car Shayne drove to his apartment-hotel. He had time to change and shower. It had been a long day. He parked in the garage under his building and went up in the elevator.

He stepped into his apartment, and closed the door, and knew that something was wrong. He reached for the light switch and his gun at the same instant. He didn't get either.

Something hard hit him in the belly.

Something quick, and hard, and skillful. Shayne doubled over. Something hit him on the back of the neck. He went to his knees. A kick shot flame through his belly. Shayne went down until his head touched the floor and his dinner spewed out.

Hands gripped his arms and he felt himself dragged to a chair, sat down, his head pulled up by the hair. Strong hands held him by the arms in the chair.

The lights came on. Shayne

blinked through his nausea. A small, slender man with half-oriental eyes stood looking at him. No more than a boy, but with the eyes of a cobra.

The boy held a large pistol of some make the redhead did not place at once.

Shayne could not see the three men who held him, forced his head to face rigidly front. But he saw the last man. This man was fat: the oily, smooth fat of a well fed and privileged type who made you think of silk cushions and *hookahs* and dancing girls.

"So, Mr. Shayne, you are a stubborn man," the fat man said softly. "I do not like that, sir. You were warned. I am quite pained. I do not usually take the pains to warn a man. Warnings are usually a waste of time. In your case I made an exception, and then you forced me to violence anyway. Quite annoying."

Shayne took a deep breath. "I'll make a note about it."

The fat man sighed. "Please, Mr. Shayne, do not be so stupid. To hurt you severely would put me in a most unhappy position, yet I cannot allow you to continue this ridiculous matter."

"Why not?" Shayne said, the nausea easing in his stomach.

The fat man shook his head. "Even that question pains me. You imply there is some question about Miss Delany's death. I assure you there is not. But we cannot allow anyone to go around stirring up in-

terest and attention in us. That is all."

"Why?"

"That is not your business. Surely by now the police must have assured you that there is no mystery about Miss Delany's death? Your investigations cannot have uncovered anything, because nothing exists. However, I understand that you work for money, as do we all, and I have no desire to see you lose work. Therefore I will pay you, say, five hundred dollars to return to Mrs. Delany and assure her that her unfortunate child did kill herself."

"Only five hundred dollars?" Shayne said.

The fat man waved a curt hand. "It is not a bribe, Mr. Shayne, simply a reimbursement for the work you might lose. If you are a good detective, you would quickly find that there is no mystery anyway. I simply wish the affair to end now."

"I'll bet you do, and your Mercori or Menander or whatever he calls himself at the moment loves publicity and attention, so don't con me!"

The fat man stared at Shayne, unblinking. Then he nodded, said:

"All right, Ben-Anni."

The thin boy with the oriental-eyes stepped to Mike Shayne and kicked him in the stomach. The boy wore sharply-pointed shoes. Shayne doubled over. The boy kicked him on the chin. The hands let him go. The boy kicked him in the head.

Even as Shayne was falling out of the chair he thought that the boy, Ben-Anni, was an expert with his feet, used them as most men used their fists.

On the floor Shayne tried to rise. Ben-Anni kicked him in the stomach again. Shayne held grimly to consciousness. He was kicked in the kidneys. Then the fat face bent over him.

"Stop. Now."

Then they were gone.

Shayne lay there fighting to stay conscious, nausea and a sick pain all through him. He struggled to his feet and made it into the bathroom where he vomited the last of his dinner. Then he doused his head, holding tight to the sink. Finally, he swayed out, managed to strip off most of his clothes, and collapsed onto the bed.

He had to sleep, but tomorrow there was work to do.

V

MIKE SHAYNE awakened with a sore belly and an ache in his back, but he felt a lot better. He showered and shaved and saw that no bruises showed. He ate six eggs and had a pot of coffee. Then he checked his automatic and went out.

He drove his car out of the garage and north out of Miami. The morning sun was bright and strong. Shayne drove straight to the mansion where Josip Mercori lived.

The mansion was an imposing

structure set back from the road behind a high wall. Shayne drove up to the locked front gate. A sal- low guard in uniform came to the gate.

"No visitors," the guard said, and started to turn away.

Shayne said, "Hold it. Right there."

The guard turned back and looked at the automatic in Shayne's hand. The redhead grinned like a wolf.

"Open up. Now," Shayne said. "And no tricks, no gun."

The guard hesitated. "You can't get close, mister."

"I can get to you. Open!"

The guard looked at Shayne's eyes, then walked to the gate and opened it. Shayne closed the gate behind him, took the pistol from the guard's belt, and turned the man around to face the house.

"Walk ahead of me," Shayne said. "Off the driveway and keep very quiet."

"Mister, you can't make it! The place is a fort. You'll get us both killed."

"You'll be first," Shayne said. "Now walk. Keep quiet, and don't think."

The guard walked. They moved off the curving driveway toward the big house. For the first fifty yards trees hid them. For the next fifty there were bushes and a sunken lawn and only the top windows of the house were visible. The sunken lawn ended in a wide flight

on concrete steps, and a long concrete wall on either side of the steps.

Shayne looked right and left. To the left the wall ended some distance away, and the sunken lawn sloped up to the main lawn. Shayne pushed the guard left. At the slope he forced the guard down, and they crawled up the slope. Shayne raised his head a fraction.

The corner of the house was some hundred feet away across open lawn. Nothing seemed to move in the big house, but Shayne would take no chances. A little farther left a series of large trees shaded a path that seemed to curve around to the rear of the house.

"Move when I say, and move fast," Shayne said to the guard. "Make for those trees and flop behind the first tree."

"You're crazy! They—"

Shayne prodded the guard. "Now!"

The guard jumped up and ran for the trees. Shayne pounded on his heels. They sprawled in the cover of the trees. Nothing moved in the house. Shayne pushed the guard ahead of him from tree to tree. They reached the rear of the mansion and Shayne saw that the path came close to the rear windows. His grey eyes flashed.

The voice spoke from somewhere inside the house. A quiet voice with an accent.

"Remain where you are! Don't try to do anything. I can see you;

you can't see me. You would die in one second if you attempt to move. Look around you!"

Shayne froze flat to the ground. He looked around. Three men stood around him on the grounds some fifty feet away. One of them was the boy with the sharp shoes, Ben-Anni. All three held submachine guns.

"A foolish attempt," the unseen voice said. "You have been watched all the way. You are trespassing and you are armed. I can kill you with complete legality. Stand up!"

Shayne touched the guard and began to stand slowly as if beaten. Halfway up he pushed the guard away, and dove for the cover of a thick tree. His hand snaked into his pocket, and came out with a wrapped package the size of a can of soup. He held the package up.

"This is an impact bomb, Mercori!" Shayne shouted. "I know what window you're behind. One move by anyone and I throw it! Your boys get me, but I get you!"

There was a frozen silence. The cobra-eyed Ben-Anni moved a step toward Shayne. The redhead drew back his arm. Ben-Anni stopped. The other men were all frozen where they stood. Shayne watched them, shouted toward the house:

"I'm not after you, Mercori! I came to talk, nothing else, but I won't be pushed around by your goons! Now I'm going to drop this



bomb, and I'm going to stand up. I'm going to keep my gun in my hand. I could kill you now if I wanted to. I don't want to. When you step out here and show yourself I'll put up my gun, and your goons put up their guns."

Shayne laid the soup-can sized package on the ground and stood up and out in full view. Ben-Anni raised his submachine gun.

"No," the voice called sharply. There was another silence, and Mercori appeared in the back door of the house. The small, slender man with the sharp nose stepped out toward Shayne with a pistol in his hand and his deep-set eyes fixed on Shayne.

"All right. You now see me," he said.

"Tell your men to put up the guns," Shayne snapped. "You keep yours."

Mercori made a motion. Reluctantly, his men uncocked their machine guns and raised the muzzles. Shayne holstered his automatic. Defenseless, he stood there watch-

ing Mercori. For a long five seconds Mercori held his pistol. Then the small man lowered it and nodded.

"Come inside," Mercori said.

Shayne walked to the rear door and inside. Mercori sat down behind a desk in what was a study. The fat man who had warned Shayne stood beside the desk.

"Now who are you?" Mercori said. "What do you want with me?"

"The name is Shayne. Mike Shayne. I'm a private detective working on Sharon Delany's death. Don't tell me your friend there didn't tell you all about who and what I am?"

Mercori's eyes flickered to the fat man. "I know nothing about you, Mr. Shayne. Do you think I should?"

"I figured you'd know what your own boys were up to," Shayne said. "That fat one there, and some others, including the snake-eyed kid outside, worked me over last night. They wanted me to cease and desist from investigating the Delany case. If you don't know about it, your men are playing games behind your back."

The fat man watched Shayne. "You are a bolder man than I expected, Shayne. My name, by the way, is Makros Bey. I am Mr. Mercori's assistant and I often handle small matters for Mr. Mercori. It is my job to see that he remains safe and unannoyed."

"You ought to be better at your job then," Shayne said.

Makros Bey nodded. "Yes, I under-estimated you. An error. Perhaps I should be replaced." The fat man looked toward Mercori. "I will tender my resignation, sir."

Mercori waved a curt hand. "Don't be stupid, Makros. We all make errors. And, Mr. Shayne, Makros is quite correct that he often acts to forestall trouble without informing me, it is part of his great value to me. He has excellent judgment. However, perhaps you had better tell me why you want to talk to me about poor Miss Delany?"

Before Shayne could answer the door burst open behind him and the slender Ben-Anni ran in, holding the soup-can size package.

"This isn't a bomb!" Ben-Anni cried. "it's a can of soup!"

"Of course," Mercori said quietly. "The instant Mr. Shayne laid it down that was obvious. If he had brought a real bomb, he would have come to use it. Mr. Shayne was merely making a point. Isn't that so, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne nodded, and looked at Ben-Anni. "I won't bring a bomb when I come to talk to the little punk, and that's the first point I'm going to make, Mercori. Keep your goons away from me or they'll get hurt, and so will you."

"I don't accept threats," Mercori said quietly, "and I do as I feel necessary. What is your next point?"

"That maybe Sharon Delany

'didn't kill herself," Shayne said bluntly.

"If that is so, then I hope you find her murderer. I liked the child. Beautiful and pleasant."

"Yet someone was kicking her out of her set-up, Mercori," Shayne said.

"Really?"

"You're telling me you didn't know about that?"

Mercori blinked. "I'm not telling you anything, Mr. Shayne. I know nothing. Sharon was a pleasant young woman. I enjoyed her company. I am fond of pretty women; they soothe me. Miss Delany was one of many, in no way special."

"She's special now, Mercori," Shayne said.

"But not to me."

"That's what I'm wondering about," Shayne said. "You live inside an army. Why? Who are you afraid of, and what did Sharon Delany perhaps learn?"

"My security is no secret, Mr. Shayne," Mercori said. "The present government of my country has tried me *in absentia* and sentenced me to death. There is a price on my head. I am naturally careful of who comes close to me. As for Miss Delany, she learned nothing at all about me beyond the fact that I am a man and could help her career. That was all she was interested in."

"Why did you stop helping?"

"I did not. I simply grew tired of Miss Delany and returned her to

her former friend. I did nothing against her."

Makros Bey laughed. "Perhaps she simply could not stand losing her place with Mr. Mercori."

"Maybe," Shayne said. "But, you know, I don't think Mr. Mercori is really the man Sharon Delany would have killed herself over. I think there's more than that."

Mercori said, "You begin to bore me, Mr. Shayne."

"You people are awful anxious to hush this up."

Makros Bey said, "I explained that it is my job to keep fleas from bothering Mr. Mercori. You are merely a flea."

Shayne grinned. "Fleas bite, and remember that even an elephant is afraid of a flea—the flea is too small to get at."

Makros Bey flushed angrily. Mercori only watched Shayne as if the redhead really were a flea.

"Do not threaten me," Mercori said. "Now I suggest you leave. Leave me alone, Mr. Shayne. I have no interest in your problems."

At some signal Shayne did not see, the skinny Ben-Anni was in the room again, with his two buddies. Mercori turned and left the room without a word. Makros Bey watched Shayne a second, and then followed his leader out.

"Come," Ben-Anni said.

Shayne walked out of the room, and out of the house. The three men escorted him to the gate. The

snakelike Ben-Anni never spoke again. Outside the gate Shayne climbed into his car and drove off.

His grey eyes were cold as he thought about Josip Mercori. The exiled leader was a cautious man, one who would not wait one second to act if he were threatened. It was an odd coincidence that Sharon Delany was involved with Mercori and had killed herself for small reason.

Shayne did not like coincidences.

VI

THE SAN SIMEON CLUB was closed, but the doors were open and men worked inside. Mike Shayne asked for Lew DiDonna and was directed to a second floor office. The club owner was working over his books.

"Mr. Shayne," DiDonna said. "I expected you last night."

"I was held up," Shayne said.

"I'm pretty busy now," DiDonna said.

"I won't take long."

"Okay," DiDonna said, and laid down his pen. The owner sat back in his chair. He was a tall, slender man with a drooping left eye and nervous hands. "What can I help you with?"

"Sharon Delany," the redhead said.

DiDonna frowned. "Sharon? I don't see what I can do for you there. I told the police all I know.

The poor kid just up and killed herself."

"Why?" Shayne said.

DiDonna rocked in his chair. "To tell you the truth, I'm not sure. Sharon wasn't the type to knock herself off. But you never know about these neurotic dames, do you?"

"Was she neurotic?"

"Hell, yes. A real up-and-down dame. Hot and cold, you know? Big plans, and then way down in the dumps."

"Was she up for a big part in a musical show?"

"Yeah," DiDonna said, "but the producer canned her. It broke her up, I admit, but I didn't think it was bad enough for her to knock herself off."

"Why was she pushed out?"

"She wasn't good enough, period."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure," DiDonna said, and his dark eyes stared straight at Shayne without a flicker.

"No other reasons to help her out of the show?"

"I wouldn't know," DiDonna said.

"Who's money is behind the show?"

"Who knows, Shayne?"

"Mercori's, or Menander maybe?"

"Not on the record."

Shayne watched the club owner light a cigar and puff nervously. DiDonna was the second one in the

case who seemed nervous, as if there were things he knew he wished he did not know—like Lucille Lawson.

"Does Mercori have money in your club?" Shayne asked.

"No," DiDonna snapped.

Shayne heard something behind the denial. Mercori did not have money in The San Simeon, but—

"Who has money in your club?"

"A lot of people," DiDonna said evasively. The owner stood up. "Listen, Shayne, I'm pretty busy. I told the cops all I knew. Sharon jumped, and that—"

"Who is in the club with money, DiDonna? Makros Bey?"

It was a shot in the dark, but not in the complete dark. It was pretty clear that Sharon Delany had been recommended to DiDonna by someone with influence. A girl her age didn't get a featured spot in a big club on talent alone. DiDonna sat down again.

"Well," DiDonna said slowly, "let's say Mr. Bey did lend me some dough, yeah."

"Bey made you take Sharon on?"

DiDonna squirmed. "He asked me. The kid had talent, so it was okay."

"Bey works for Mercori, DiDonna," Shayne snapped. "It's a thousand-to-one if Bey had money, he got it from Mercori."

"I wouldn't know."

"Why did you fire Sharon?"

"I didn't."



"But you were going to? She knew?"

DiDonna twisted in his chair. The owner took out a handkerchief and mopped his face. "Look, Shayne, the girl wasn't that good. I told her I was going to have to let her go as soon as I had a new show ready. It's not so unusual. I change my shows from time to time."

"But you keep the same faces a lot of the time," Shayne said. "You could have found a spot for her in the new show. Who told you to drop her?"

DiDonna sweated. The club owner seemed to be looking for a way out. Shayne watched him. DiDonna squirmed.

"Listen, Shayne, I don't know from nothing, see? The girl had no talent, really. Then, well, Mr. Bey sort of hinted that she wasn't in so good any more that he wouldn't mind so much if she got canned. That's all I needed. I canned her as of the end of the show."

"Did Bey tell you why she wasn't in so good any more?"

"No, only—well, I figure she'd not been playing ball."

"You're sure it wasn't that maybe she knew too much?"

DiDonna wiped at his face. "I don't know nothing about that."

"How did she take it? When you told her?"

DiDonna shrugged. "She was mad as a wet hen."

"Mad?" Shayne snapped. "Not sad, not distraught?"

"Mad as hell. She said I'd be sorry. She was gonna take it up with the big man himself. She said—"

DiDonna stopped and turned pale. Shayne leaned close to the sweating nightclub man. The grey eyes of the redhead bored into DiDonna.

"What did she say, DiDonna?"

"Nothing. I mean, it didn't mean nothing!" DiDonna cried.

"I can turn this over to Gentry, DiDonna! Something stinks in all this, and I'm going to find out what! You hear?"

DiDonna was pale. "Okay, Shayne. She said she was gonna talk to the big man, and I'd get the word. She said if the big man thought he could dump her he was crazy."

"Why?"

"I don't know. She didn't say any more. Just that the big man couldn't dump her like that. She was gonna talk to him."

"What happened?"

DiDonna looked at the ceiling. "Nothing."

"You didn't get any word? She didn't talk to Mercori?"

"Who said anything about Mercori?"

"Mercori has to be the big man, and you know it! Now what happened?"

DiDonna shrugged. "She jumped that night. I don't know if she talked to him or not."

Shayne watched the nightclub owner. DiDonna would not meet his eyes. Sharon Delany had been going to talk to Mercori, had been going to put on some kind of pressure, and that night she had "jumped." Shayne stood up.

"Don't go on any trips, DiDonna," Shayne said. "Gentry'll want to talk to you, I think."

"I'm not going anywhere," DiDonna said sullenly. "Why should I? I don't know nothing."

"Maybe you know more than you think," Shayne said.

Shayne left the owner biting his lip. The stink was getting dirtier. It looked as if Mrs. Delany had more than a prejudice against suicide to go on.

VII

MIKE SHAYNE strode into his office, still thinking about Sharon Delany and the pressure she had threatened to put on Josep Mercori. His mind came alert when he saw Lucy Hamilton's eyes. His brown-

eyed secretary nodded toward his inner office.

"A man to see you, Michael," Lucy said softly. "He's inside. He wouldn't give his name, and I think he's carrying a gun."

Shayne nodded, drew his automatic, and slipped it into his pocket. Then he walked softly to the door of his private office. His hand in his pocket, he stepped quickly into the office.

A small, compact man looked up from where he sat near Shayne's desk. "Mr. Michael Shayne?"

"I'm Shayne," he said.

"I'd like a few minutes of your time, Mr. Shayne," the stocky man said.

Shayne walked to his desk and sat down. His grey eyes never left the man's face, and his hand remained in his pocket on his automatic. Shayne could see the faint bulge of the pistol at the compact man's belt under his coat.

"Go ahead," Shayne said.

The man's face showed no expression at all. "My name is Jones, Walter Jones. May I ask if this office is secure?"

"It's secure," Shayne said, and eyed the man. "Government?"

"Yes," Jones said. "Off the record I work for the Central Intelligence Agency."

"What do you want, Mr. Jones?"

"I understand you're working on the Sharon Delany suicide," Jones said slowly. "Hired by the mother, right?"

"My client's name is confidential," Shayne said. "What about the Delany matter?"

"The police, and my department, are satisfied that it was suicide. There is no need for investigation, and a great need for closing the matter without publicity or further attention. Am I clear?"

"You're clear," Shayne said. "Now let's get it on the record, Jones. If you work for CIA, show me your credentials. Prove who you are or get out of here."

Jones watched Shayne for a moment. Then, still without any expression, reached into his coat pocket and produced his wallet. He handed his credentials to Shayne. The redhead studied them, and returned them.

"Good," Shayne said. "Now I've been officially asked to drop an investigation, so I can officially tell you to go to hell."

Jones colored. "You listen to me, Shayne! We—"

"No," Shayne snapped, "you listen to me! This case is starting to look dirtier and dirtier. I don't know what happened to Sharon Delany, not yet, but the more I look, the muddier the water gets. Maybe she killed herself, or maybe she killed herself because of some special terror, or maybe someone helped her out of that window. I don't know, Jones, but I'm going to know!"

The CIA man did not even

blink. "You have some evidence to suggest Miss Delany did not kill herself?"

"I have evidence," Shayne said. "Not the kind that you can use in court, not yet. But enough to know that something smells bad. You don't want any laundry washed for Mercori. I understand that, but I've got a job, and I'm going to do it no matter who gets hurt. You can't sweep murder under the rug, and you can't hide the kind of pressure that could make a girl kill herself."

Jones stood up. "Very well, Shayne. I'll take your answer back, and we'll see what can be hidden. The Delany girl wasn't important enough to make us let her rock the international boat."

"Everyone is important enough, Jones."

"You have a lot to learn," Jones said.

The CIA man turned on his heel and left. Shayne stared in anger after the CIA man. Then his grey eyes became thoughtful. A lot of pressure was being exerted. Mercori had all kinds of protection. The man was harder to get close to than Fort Knox.

But Sharon Delany had been close to Mercori. Maybe quite a bit too close.

A lot of people seemed to have a lot on their minds. No one was talking straight to Shayne. Everywhere he went he found more doubts and more questions.

Maybe the boy-friend, Larry Ames, would have some answers.

VIII

THE FLAMINGO ARMS was a beach apartment house of the type that had a complex of three-story buildings set around a lush green and flowered court. Larry Ames's apartment was on the second floor of a rear building.

"Yeah?" Ames said as he opened the door.

The boy friend was a big, burly man about twenty-six, looking the worse for lack of sleep. Ames was as big as Mike Shayne, but he looked soft. He also looked bleak and hungover, his face pale with dissipation.

"My name's Mike Shayne, Ames," Shayne said. "I want to talk to you."

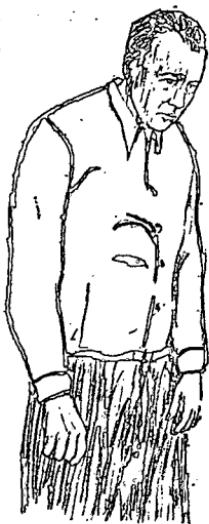
"Who says I want to talk to you?"

Shayne grinned with his lips only. A wolfish grin. "Who asked if you wanted to talk to me? I'm coming in."

Ames's fists clenched, and he looked hard at Shayne. The detective grinned and stood loosely. Slowly Ames's fists unclenched. The big man shrugged.

"Okay, so come in."

Shayne followed Ames into a sunny living room. Ames lived well. A door was open, and Shayne saw the bed through the open door. The bed had not been slept in, but



it had been rested on. Ames sat down and picked up a drink.

"Hair of the dog," Ames said sourly. "What do you want to talk to me about?"

"Sharon Delany," Shayne said bluntly.

Ames leaned. "Get the hell out of here! You hear me? I've talked all I'm going to about Sharon! How did I know the broad was nutty?"

"Was she?"

"As a fruitcake! She's out of a show and I call it quits, so she kills herself? That's about as nutty as you can get."

"Why did you call it quits?"

Ames blinked. "Why? Because I was tired of her. Hell, she wasn't anything special. She was playing footsie with Mercori, anyway."

"You got her into Mercori's circle."

Ames nodded. "Sure. She wanted me to. She had big ambition, and she figured Mercori could help her out. He did, too."

"Why did he stop helping her?" the redhead asked.

Ames shrugged, drank. "How do I know?"

Shayne watched the big man and saw his eyes flicker away. There it was again, that evasiveness Shayne had encountered ever since he started on the case. Ames, too, was hiding something.

"I think you know, Ames," Shayne said. "She was your girl, no matter how special, and I think she told you about Mercori."

"Keep on thinking, Shamus," Ames sneered.

"How much is Mercori paying you, Ames?" Shayne snapped.

"Nothing!"

Shayne leaned toward the man. "I think Sharon was murdered, Ames. I think Mercori killed her, or had her killed, and I think you know why!"

"No!"

"I found marks near that window, Ames. Sharon was dragged to that window!" Shayne said, his voice cold. "She wasn't alone. Lucille Lawson knows something and so do you! Mercori put pressure on DiDonna to get her out of the club and the show. She said she was going to talk to Mercori. I think she did, and he killed her, and you're covering up!"

"No, you—" Ames choked on

his own anger, and with a sudden motion hurled the drink at Shayne's head.

Shayne ducked, and sensed Ames lunging at him. He saw the big fist of the boy friend coming straight for his jaw. He had only time to slip, and the blow did not hit solid.

Larry Ames was big, and the blow was solid enough to send Shayne over backwards.

Shayne hit on his left side and bounced against a couch. Ames kicked at him. Shayne caught the big man's foot and twisted. Ames went over sprawling. Shayne jumped up. Ames was up. The big man came in swinging. Shayne stepped inside a looping right and planted a solid left on Ames's jaw.

The big man staggered back but did not go down. Shayne went in with a right and left. Ames caught the left on his shoulder, blocked the right, and swung his own right into Shayne's belly. Shayne grunted and his knees wobbled. Ames came in. Shayne ducked an accurate left, and sank his right into Ames's belly.

The big man doubled over. Ames's belly was soft. Shayne straightened Ames up with a left hook, and finished the fight with a right cross. Ames lay on the floor, breathing heavily. Shayne bent down over the big man.

"What are you covering up, Ames?"

The big man shook his head,

gasping for breath. Shayne shook Ames. He doubled his fist and put the fist in front of Ames's eyes.

"Did Sharon talk to Mercori?"

"How do I—" Ames began.

Shayne hit him. Ames cringed, all the fight gone out of him now.

"Okay, okay!" Ames cried. "Yeah, she talked to him. She told me. She said it was all fixed. She was giving me the air, and she was going to—"

Ames stopped and Shayne's grey eyes glowed as he looked at the big man.

"So Sharon gave you the gate," Shayne said. "And she said it was all fixed with Mercori. That scratches just about all the reasons for suicide, doesn't it?"

Ames said nothing.

"I never heard of a woman killing herself over a man she had dumped," Shayne said. "Who told you to tell the police that you had broken with Sharon?"

"No one. It—"

Shayne hit Ames again. "Come on, Ames! Someone told you, and probably paid you, to make it look like Sharon had a reason to kill herself. Tell me—"

The shot spat from the sunny window to the rear. A sharp, spitting sound, and then two more like explosions of breath. Glass shattered. Something slammed into an upholstered chair a foot from Shayne's head. The redhead went over in a dive behind the couch. His automatic was out. There was

blood all over him, but he was not hit.

Larry Ames lay unmoving, blood spreading around him.

Shayne crouched behind furniture and made his way quickly to the window. He peered out. There was a small balcony on the outside. Shayne looked below, and another shot smashed through the window to his left. He went down again.

When he raised his head carefully and scanned the back courtyard below there was nothing but sun and silence. Close, but hidden by trees, a car motor started and quickly roared away. Shayne went back to Larry Ames.

The big man was dead: shot twice; once in the head and once in the chest. Accurate shooting, with a silenced pistol from the balcony.

Bold shooting, done in broad daylight, and by a man who could both handle a gun and know how not to be seen.

Shayne crouched over Ames for another minute. He found nothing in the dead man's pockets to help him. His grey eyes stared at the inert body with a savage gleam in them.

He jumped up and strode to the telephone. He called the Miami Beach police anonymously. He had no time to waste talking to Peter Painter.

Shayne left the apartment on the dead run for his car.

IX

LUCILLE LAWSON answered the door after Mike Shayne's third ring. The redhead strode past the startled woman and went to the windows. He checked every window. There were no balconies or fire escapes. There was one other entrance, locked from the inside. Lucille Lawson watched Shayne the whole time.

"Could you possibly tell me what is going on, Mr. Shayne?" the girl said.

Shayne sat down and stared at the girl. Lucille Lawson remained standing.

"Well?" Lucille Lawson said.

"Tell me about Sharon's talk with Mercori. Where did she see him that night? What did she have on him? What did she know?"

Lucille Lawson swore. "Damn it, Shayne, I've told you I don't know anything about this except that Sharon jumped out of a window."

"Maybe she did," Shayne said, "but not without a little help. Maybe it was physical help, and maybe only psychological, but she had help and you know it! Maybe she was pushed, or thrown, or maybe she was just so scared she jumped. But there was something."

Lucille Lawson sneered. "So many maybes? You're not much of a detective, are you? Anyway, all your maybes are dead wrong, as far as I know."

"Forget it, Lucille," Shayne snapped. "Ames is dead."

"I won't forget what—"

She stopped, blinked, and her hand went up to cover her gaping mouth.

"Dead?" she cried. "Larry?"

"Shot not a half an hour ago. To shut him up, I figure. I figure you'll be next!"

"Me? Someone will—" She could not finish the sentence.

"Someone will try. I'm sure of it. Whoever it is took a shot at me, too, but I'm not important. It was Ames they wanted, and Ames got it. Where were you a half an hour ago?"

She blinked. "Me? Out shopping. I—I just got back."

"Can you prove it?"

"Why—well, no," Lucille Lawson said. "You don't think that I shot him!"

"I don't think anything special right now," Shayne said, "but maybe I will if you don't start telling the truth. For instance, there are marks on your floor near that window. High heel marks. The rug had been moved to cover them. Who moved that rug? You?"

"No! I—"

Lucille Lawson stared at Shayne. "Larry was shot? Killed?"

"That's right, Lucille. Someone is playing rough."

She sat down as if her legs had gone to jelly. Her hands twisted, and her face was like death—her own death. She sat where her legs

had deposited her, on the edge of a chair, awkwardly.

"Yes," she said slowly, her voice shaking, "I moved the rug. I straightened up, after—"

"After you got home and saw the window open and Sharon's body down there in the street," Shayne said grimly.

She nodded. "Yes. I—I knew that something had happened. I saw him."

"Who?"

"Mercori," Lucille Lawson said.

"Go on," Shayne said. "Take it from the beginning."

The girl shuddered. "Sharon came home that evening as mad as a hatter. She said she'd been fired from her show, and DiDonna was going to throw her out of the club, too. She said Mercori was behind it because she had been giving him a hard time lately. She said she was going to show Mercori that he couldn't push her around, no matter how big a shot he was."

"She called him and told him to come over here. She told me to stay away that night. So I did. I stayed out real late. But when I came home I saw Mercori leaving the building."

"Alone?"

"Yes," Lucille said. "I mean, he left the building alone, but Bey and that Ben-Anni were in the car when it picked him up. They drove off, so I went on up to see how Sharon had made out. I came in and there were some chairs and a



table knocked over, and the window was open. I ran to the window and saw her lying down there. It's a side street; I came from the other way. No one had seen her yet. I started to call the police when Mr. Bey came back. He threatened me. Then he offered me a lot of money."

"How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars," Lucille Lawson said. "He—he said that it had been an accident. That Sharon had had a fight with Mr. Mercori, that she'd gone to the window and stood up on the ledge to make Mr. Mercori give her her jobs back. Only she slipped and fell. I—"

"You believed that? Or did you believe the ten thousand dollars," Shayne said drily.

Lucille stared at the floor. "Both, I suppose. I knew Sharon could

have acted like that, and I knew they had been drinking because there were glasses and a whole empty quart of whisky." She looked at Shayne. "But I wanted that money, too. So I agreed to say nothing. I straightened up. Then I called the police. Mr. Bey sent me the money the next day."

"Do you still have it?"

She nodded. "Yes. And the envelope it came in."

"Let me have it."

She went into a closet and poked behind the baseboard. She drew out a plain white envelope fat with money. Shayne held the envelope at the corners. He wrapped it carefully in a silk scarf the girl gave him, and put it in his pocket. Lucille Lawson watched him with a mixture of fear and greed in her eyes.

"All right," Shayne said. "Now what did Sharon know that was going to force Mercori to give her back her jobs?"

"I don't know, Mr. Shayne, really. She never did tell me that. She just laughed about it."

"Did anyone else see Mercori that night?"

She shook her head. "No, not that I know. Our night doorman wasn't around. He usually hides in the basement. The door is locked; he isn't really needed. When the cab drove up, there was no one on the street except Mercori coming out and his car with Bey and Ben-Anni in it."

"Cab?" Shayne snapped. "You came home by taxi?"

"Yes, I usually do. My car is—" Lucille stopped. "Of course, I see. The driver! I'm sure he saw Mr. Mercori and can tell you."

"Did you get his name?"

"No, of course not. But it was a Dolphin Taxi. Yellow."

"Where did you pick it up?"

"At The Juggler Club, out on the highway. I go there a lot. It was about four o'clock in the morning when I got it. I'm sure he'd remember!"

"He probably would," Shayne said. "You never talked to Mercori himself about it?"

"No, just Mr. Bey. He said the ten thousand dollars was all I would get, and he threatened me. He said it was just to keep Mr. Mercori out of any involvement in a messy situation, and that if I tried to get any more I would be—handled another way."

Shayne nodded. "All right, Lucille. Now I figure you're in a lot of danger. It's pretty clear that Mercori wanted the whole thing hushed up, and tried to buy everyone off. But I got into the act, and now he's running scared. Or someone is. Ames had to have been killed to shut him up."

She was shaking now. "You've got to protect me, Mr. Shayne! I've told you the truth!"

"I hope so," Shayne said. "Lock your doors. Don't open for anyone, not anyone, until I call on the tele-

phone, and you know it's me outside, and you know the police are with me."

"No! Take me with you! I'm afraid—"

"That would be crazy. They're already after me. We'd just be a bigger target, and the killer would get one of us almost for sure. As long as you do what I say you'll be safe here. I'll send the doorman up to watch the apartment as well. I won't be gone long."

She hesitated, then slowly nodded, fear clear on her face, but her lips set. Shayne checked the door and windows again and left.

In the corridor he studied all doors and corners carefully. He saw nothing. He walked to the elevator, and fingered his automatic as the doors sighed open. The elevator was empty. Shayne pressed the lobby button and stood back as the car glided downward.

The doors slid open in the lobby. There was no one in sight. Shayne found the doorman, and, for the price of a ten dollar bill, sent him up to watch Lucille Lawson's apartment.

Then Shayne went out to his car. He had one more stop before he paid a visit on Will Gentry at Miami Police Headquarters.

X

THE GARAGE OF The Dolphin Cab Company was a busy place in the early afternoon. The dis-

patcher finally located the taxi that had picked up a fare at The Juggler Club at four o'clock on the morning Sharon Delany had died.

"Here we are. Al Downey," the dispatcher said. "Al's out on the street. He ought to pull in soon."

"Can you call him in?" Shayne asked.

"Not a chance. The boss would have our hides. You'll have to wait."

Shayne waited. Al Downey came in for a break an hour later. Shayne described Lucille Lawson.

"I remember," Downey said. "It was late, and that was around my last call. I picked her up at The Juggler, took her to a big apartment house."

"Do you remember seeing anyone on the streets?"

"No," Downey said, "except a guy came out of the apartment. A big car picked him up. I remember because the car almost hit me going in."

"Describe the man who came out," Shayne said.

"Downey looked doubtful. 'Well—'

Shayne dangled a ten dollar bill. Downey licked his lips. Then the driver described Josip Mercori down to the last detail. Mike Shayne handed Downey the ten spot.

"How come you remember him so well?" Shayne asked.

"Well, he was acting kind of funny. I mean, he came out in a

hell of a hurry, like he'd seen a ghost. He really ran into that big car," Downey said. "Anyway, the dame in my cab got all excited when she saw him. She told me to wait while he got into that car, and not to pull up in front until the car was gone."

"Did you see anyone else?"

"No, the dame went in and I got out of there."

Shayne thanked Downey, and went back to his car. It was not a sure thing, but it was enough to go to Gentry with—and fast. There was a killer running around looking for witnesses to silence.

Twenty minutes later, Chief Will Gentry sat in silence and listened to all that Mike Shayne had to tell him. When the redhead was finished, Gentry chewed on his cigar a moment, and then flicked his intercom.

"Send Bellows to pick up Lucille Lawson immediately," Gentry snapped to his assistant. "He knows where. Tell him to go fast but careful, and watch out for strangers."

Gentry flicked off the intercom and looked at Shayne. "Okay, Mike, Mercori was there. At least we know that. The rest is only Lucille Lawson's word."

"DiDonna confirms that Sharon was mad, and was going to talk to Mercori. And it was Makros Bey who hinted that the girl could be eased out," Shayne said. "On top of that Ames admitted that it was

Sharon who ditched him, so scratch one more motive for suicide. Then there's those heel marks I found."

Gentry scowled. "I'm damned if I know how Bellows missed those marks. He's got some explaining to do." Gentry chewed hard on his cigar. "Why was Mercori there so damned late, Mike? That's a hell of a funny hour for a conference."

"Maybe she was doing more than talk," Shayne said. "Or maybe Mercori was there earlier and came back. This wasn't just a lover's spat, Will. She had some weapon against him. Maybe he made a lot of promises and then thought it over later and decided to be sure by going back and killing her."

"Maybe," Gentry said.

"Then he shot Ames because Ames knew what Sharon had known," Shayne said.

Gentry scowled. "The only thing that puzzles me is why Mercori was there himself. He's harder to get alone than the Queen of England. Why didn't he send his goons?"

"I don't know, Will, but maybe we better find out."

Gentry nodded. "Yeah. We've got enough to pick him up and see what is going on."

"Especially with Ames dead," Shayne said.

"No," Gentry said, "we've got nothing there, Mike. You don't know who killed Ames or why, and Painter doesn't either. The last I heard he hasn't a clue. If he knew you had been there, you'd be under

his hot lights now. He needs some help."

"Maybe we can find the gun that killed Ames," Shayne said.

Before Gentry could answer his intercom buzzed. The voice of his assistant said, "Lieutenant Bellows on four, Chief."

Gentry picked up his telephone. His heavy brows seemed to swell as he listened. Then Gentry hung up and looked at Shayne.

"The Lawson woman isn't in the apartment. The door was open. Your bird had flown! The doorman was knocked out."

Shayne was on his feet. "Let's get out to Mercori's place, Will. A thousand-to-one he's got her. And if he's got her, she may be dead already!"

Gentry flicked his intercom again and began to snap low, harsh orders.

After a fast ride, the police cars slid silently up the road to the massive gate in the high stone wall. Behind the wall the mansion was quiet in the late afternoon sun. The guard stepped out of the gatehouse. Will Gentry led his men to the gate.

"Police. Open it," Gentry said.

The guard hesitated. "I don't know, officer. I—"

"I've got a warrant," Gentry snapped. "Mercori will see us. Tell him."

The guard went to the gatehouse and moments later returned and opened the gate. The police cars drove up the driveway to the big



house. Mercori's men stood watchful all around. Gentry ignored them, but the Chief's men casually took up covering positions.

Gentry and Shayne walked through the front door. The fat Makros Bey stood in the hall with a puzzled expression on his smooth face. Behind him, to his left, the skinny Ben-Anni leaned against

the wall as if asleep. The small gunman was not asleep, though, and Shayne watched him.

"Chief Gentry," Makros Bey said. "May I ask the purpose of this visit?"

"You can ask," Gentry growled, "but I talk to Mercori. Where is he?"

Makros Bey hesitated, then

bowed slightly. "If you will come with me."

Shayne, Gentry and three of his men followed Makros Bey along the dim hallway to the study at the rear of the house. At his desk, Josip Mercori nodded to them, and looked curiously at both Shayne and Gentry.

"Good afternoon, Chief Gentry," Mercori said, "and Mr. Shayne. I did not expect to see you again, Mr. Shayne. I gather that this is an official visit?"

Gentry nodded. "It is, Mr. Mercori. I'm afraid I have a warrant for your arrest."

Makros Bey jumped a foot. "What? How dare—"

Ben-Anni slipped his hand into his suit-coat pocket, came alert. Mercori waved his men to silence. The exiled leader let his cool eyes roam across Gentry and Shayne's faces.

"Perhaps you'll explain, Chief?" Mercori said quietly. "I am ready to cooperate with all American authorities, but my position is rather special. Are your Federal authorities aware of this matter?"

"They will be soon enough," Gentry said. "This is my city, Mercori, and in this country we have laws. This matter is not Federal."

"Tell me what it is, Chief," Mercori said.

"I'm afraid it may be murder, Mr. Mercori," Gentry said bluntly.

Makros Bey burst out. "Don't be ridiculous, Chief Gentry! I warn

you that we will use all our power with your superiors to break you if you pursue this farce!"

Gentry looked at Bey. "Shut up. You're in this, too. We don't like conspiracy in this city."

Mercori silenced his aide with a gesture. "Who has been murdered, Chief Gentry?"

Gentry stared at the small exiled leader. "I have to warn you that anything you say may be used against you in a court of law, Mr. Mercori, and advise you that you do not have to answer my questions, and have the right to legal counsel. Do you understand that?"

"I understand," Mercori said.

"Were you in the apartment of Sharon Delany between four and four-thirty on the morning she died, Mr. Mercori?"

Mercori seemed to think for a minute. Then he nodded. "Yes, Chief, I was there."

XI

JOSIP MERCORI waved Mike Shayne and Chief Gentry to a seat. Both men remained standing. Mercori watched them and shrugged.

"I should have come forward," Mercori said, "but in my position it is very bad for me to become involved in notoriety. I was there, but not quite at the times you mention. I arrived at about ten minutes after four, and left about half past four. She had jumped before I arrived."

Shayne watched the small leader. The study was very silent. Gentry chewed on his cigar uneasily. There was going to be hell to pay if Mercori was tied to the murder of a young girl who had probably been his mistress.

"Tell us the whole story from the start, Mr. Mercori?" Gentry said.

"The story?" Mercori said. "But what story, Chief Gentry? I don't understand. I was foolish not to report that I had found Miss Delany dead, but it seemed inconsequential at the time. Later, the CIA advised me to be silent, since the poor girl had obviously killed herself. However, if it is murder, I am glad to cooperate. But I know nothing of value."

"Just tell us the story," Gentry said.

Makros Bey snarled. "Don't you see, Josip, they are trying to involve you! They will—"

Gentry snapped, "I told you to shut up, Bey! I'll get to you."

Mercori glanced quickly at Makros Bey, and then back at Gentry. "I still do not understand what you mean by the 'story'. A Mr. Larry Ames brought the girl to me some time ago. I found her eager and pleasing. We became, shall we say, friendly. I secured her employment at Mr. DiDonna's club, and in a musical show in which I have an interest. That was all."

"Go on," Gentry said.

Shayne was listening with a

frown on his face, and his eyes watching Ben-Anni and Makros Bey. The two henchmen seemed uneasy, alert. Mercori shrugged his shoulders.

"But that is all. The young lady was busy; she had her lover, Mr. Ames, and she and I ceased to be close. That night she called me to ask if I would intercede for her with DiDonna and the producer of her show. I told her I had no idea she was in trouble, and of course I would help her. I arranged to meet her in the morning. But about three o'clock that night she called me and insisted I come right to her. I did and found her dead below the open window. That is all."

"You didn't get her fired?" Gentry snapped.

"Of course not."

"Lew DiDonna says you did," Shayne said.

"Then he lies."

"Ames implied you did," Gentry said.

"Another liar," Mercori said, his voice growing edgy now.

"Lucille Lawson says that Sharon implied that she had some hold on you, that she could force you to get her jobs back for her."

"She did not!" Mercori said. "She was a harmless little girl with few brains, too much ambition, and a rather animal cunning as to how to use her charms to get what she wanted. That was all she was. I had no idea that she was in any trouble, and I would have helped

her instantly if I had known. Someone is telling you many lies, Chief Gentry."

"Who?" Shayne said. "And why."

"I have no idea, Mr. Shayne. Possibly to cover his own guilt," Mercori said, and suddenly his eyes were thoughtful. "As a matter of fact, I recall that when she called me that night she indicated that she was not alone. I had the impression that Mr. Ames was with her, yes. She whispered that she would have to, as she said, 'clear the field of other candidates.' I think it was Mr. Ames who was with her."

"Did you see him when you arrived?" Shayne said.

"No, I saw no one. Simply the open window, and the bottle of liquor, and a single glass."

"One glass?" Gentry said.

"One," Mercori said.

"And you think Ames may have been the one trying to frame you because he killed Sharon himself?" Shayne said.

"He would seem to be the logical one," Mercori said.

"Especially since he's dead," Gentry said.

Mercori narrowed his eyes. "Dead?"

"Murdered," Shayne said. "Shot from ambush. By someone who could shoot like your men, Mercori."

"I'm afraid you'll have to come with us, Mr. Mercori," Gentry said.

Makros Bey cried, "Don't you see what is happening, Josip? It is the work of our enemies!"

Gentry whirled on Bey. "I've told you, Bey! You'll come downtown, too. I want—"

Mercori said, "All right, Makros."

Shayne realized an instant too late that it was a signal. A gun appeared in Makros Bey's fat hand. Ben-Anni had a gun. Shayne tried for his automatic, and Gentry had his pistol half out. They were facing Makros Bey and Ben-Anni. Mercori spoke behind them.

"Do not use your weapons, please."

Mercori stood with a pistol. Gentry swore.

"You're crazy, Mercori. You can't get away like this," the Chief said.

"No, Chief Gentry, there is a plot here, and I cannot take the risk of allowing myself to be placed in prison," Mercori said. "Do not try to stop me, or many of your men will be harmed. Ben-Anni has given a signal for them to shoot if necessary. I have too much work to do to be, how do you say, framed for such a stupid thing."

"My men have the place surrounded, you fool," Gentry snapped.

"It does not matter," Mercori said. "Do you think we have not planned for such an eventuality? Unless you attempt to shoot, my men will do nothing. But if you try

to stop me, then there will be trouble, no matter who you are, Chief. We have fought the police many times in our lives."

"You won't get out of the city," Gentry said.

"Yes I will, Chief," Mercori said. "You will all please lie on the floor."

Shayne and Gentry and Gentry's three men all lay down. They lay face down on a quick order from Ben-Anni. The skinny gunman stood behind where they lay.

"Tie them, Ben-Anni," Mercori said.

"Josip," Makros Bey said, "is there time? These are the police. Other of his men may come in at any moment. I do not think we should risk it. He is the Chief of Police. His staff will be contacting him. Men will come looking soon."

There was a silence. Then Ben-Anni spoke. The small gunman's voice was like the voice of a boy. "I will tie them, Excellency. You must not be only with one man to protect you."

"Do you suggest I cannot protect His Excellency?" Makros Bey demanded.

"No, sir, only that two are better than one, and I am better trained than you, Makros Bey," Ben-Anni said. "It is our rule to never allow His Excellency to be with only one man. And it does not matter who that man is."

"Rules are made to be broken when the need arises," Makros Bey

said, "and we waste precious seconds."

Mercori decided. "Makros is right, Ben-Anni. You will remain here with these men. We will meet as arranged. Understood?"

"I understand," Ben-Anni said.

On his face on the floor, Shayne listened. He heard Mercori and Makros Bey walk across the room. Then there was a creaking, sliding sound. Then silence.

Shayne sensed Ben-Anni somewhere behind where Shayne lay on his face. He looked at his watch in front of his face. They had been inside the house some ten minutes only. The men outside would not begin to wonder for at least another half an hour, not with five of them in the house.

Another ten minutes past, and Shayne could think of no way to make a move to take Ben-Anni. Lying on their faces, the five of them could not make a concerted move, and did not know exactly where Ben-Anni was. Mercori's men knew their jobs.

Then Shayne became aware of something wrong. He blinked and breathed softly. He moved his head slowly, and looked up and behind him.

The room was empty. Ben-Anni was gone.

"Will!" Shayne snapped, and jumped up.

Gentry was beside him.

"One of you go and alert the men," the Chief snapped to his

men. "Arrest everyone. Do it without shooting if you can. Alert all the patrols around the house. Mike, come on."

Gentry and Shayne jumped to the wall. They found the hidden door. It led down a steep flight of steps into a passage that stretched ahead under the ground. Shayne, Gentry and the other two of Gentry's men hurried along the passage.

The passage ended in a door less than two hundred yards from the house. In a matter of moments they broke down the door and came out in a building.

"Some kind of garage!" Gentry said.

Shayne went to the door. "Outside the walls. It's a dirt side road."

One of Gentry's men said, "They had a car here. It's gone."

The four men all looked down the dirt road that still glowed in the late evening sun.

"They've given us the slip," Shayne said.

"But not for long, Mike," Gentry said grimly. "They won't get out of Miami."

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "I wonder. They're not just criminals, Will. Mercori is a big man, and once he's out of the city, I'm not sure you have enough to get him back."

"With the Lawson girl, I—. Damn, the Lawson girl!" Gentry cried.

The four men hurried back

through the passage. They met Lieutenant Bellows on the way.

"We got them all, Chief," Bellows said, "only I don't know what we can hold them on."

"Nothing," Gentry growled, "but let them cool their heels a day in jail as material witnesses. I want them out of circulation. Did you find any bodies? The Lawson woman?"

"We just got a call from Headquarters," Bellows said. "She walked in twenty minutes ago. Said she was abducted, but they let her go. She's giving her statement."

Gentry rubbed his hands. "Then we'll get Mercori!"

Shayne frowned and began to rub his chin. Something was bothering the redhead.

XII

MIKE SHAYNE was in his favorite restaurant, on his third coffee and first cognac, when he knew what was bothering him.

Everything.

All at once Shayne believed Josip Mercori. The exiled leader had killed no one. Mercori had ordered no one killed.

It was all wrong, all a fake, and it began with the marks of high heels under Sharon Delany's window, the marks of shoe polish on the air-conditioner. George Bellows was too good a policeman to have missed those marks.

Shayne pushed away his coffee,

drained his cognac, and lighted a cigarette. George Bellows, or any cop on the detective squad ten minutes wouldn't have missed a moved rug and heel marks under a window from which a woman had supposedly jumped. Never! He, Michael Shayne, was an idiot not to have guessed at once!

Bellows had not found those marks, because they had not been there when Bellows looked!

Shayne counted out his money for the bill, clapped on his panama, and strode to the telephone. He dialed Gentry's special number.

"Any word, Will?"

"Not yet, Mike," Gentry said. "They've literally vanished. We've got an APB out, every way out of the city is covered."

"Do you have a man tailing the Lawson girl?"

"Of course. One tailing and two guarding. We figure they might try to hit her. She's the key witness."

"She sure is," Shayne said drily. "Where is she now?"

"At her apartment, last report. I've got a man watching DiDonna, too, just in case."

"Good," Shayne said. "Any word from Painter on Larry Ames's killer?"

"Only that it was a foreign-made gun, foreign bullets. It was the type of gun carried by some of Mercori's men, but the slugs don't match any of the guns we got from the men we're holding. Painter's waiting, and looking for Mercori, too. He's



also looking into everyone Ames knew, or any enemies Ames might have had."

"Okay, Will. I'll be in touch," Shayne said.

"Mike? What's up? You sound like a man with something on his mind."

"Nothing, Will. Nothing at all," Shayne said, because he was not yet sure what was on his mind. Only that there was something wrong with the whole affair. Something very wrong.

He hung up and strode out to his car. He drove fast through the city to a small frame house in a quiet middle-class section. The name on the mail box was Delany. Shayne pressed the doorbell. Mrs. Mary

Delany opened the door and looked up at the redhead.

"Why, Mr. Shayne!" Mrs. Delany said.

"Can I talk to you, Mrs. Delany?"

"Why, of course," the motherly woman said, fluttering her hands to invite Shayne into the small but scrupulously neat living room of the small house. She perched on a flowered chair. "You—you have news for me? You know who killed my Sharon?"

"No, Mrs. Delany, not yet," Shayne said. "But I have some questions."

"Questions? I really don't see what I could tell you."

"You can tell me where you got the money, Mrs. Delany," Shayne said quietly.

Mrs. Delany flinched where she sat. "The money? What money, Mr. Shayne?"

"When you came to me you said you could pay me. I only asked for a token payment, but you couldn't have known I would do that. You must have known I charge pretty high, and the job might have taken a long time. Where did you get the money? You acted as if you were sure you could pay me."

"I have savings, Mr. Shayne," Mary Delany said.

Shayne looked around the clean but shabby room. "No, Mrs. Delany, I don't believe you. A woman like you doesn't think of paying perhaps five or six hundred dollars,

maybe more, to a private detective. No, you wouldn't have thought of coming to me on your own. You'd have gone to the police."

"I did go to the police!" Mrs. Delany insisted.

"You'd have kept on going, badgered them, written letters," Shayne said, "but not hired a private detective. I can check, Mrs. Delany. I can find out how much money you had and have. I can see if you drew out a large sum, or if maybe you deposited a large sum recently."

There was a silence in the neat little room. Mrs. Mary Delany looked around as if not quite sure where she was. Then she sighed, and her face grew harder.

"My daughter was dead," she said, her voice suddenly harsher. "Killed herself, they said. I didn't believe that, but even if she had jumped from that window it was them who made her do it. I hated them: that Menander, that terrible fat Makros Bey, all of them. I wanted to hurt them, but I didn't have any way."

Her motherly face was set in hate, then it suddenly twisted into a smile, a grotesque smile. "Then he came to me. He said he thought Menander, or whatever his real name is, had at least driven Sharon to suicide. He offered to give me money if I would hire you to investigate the case. He told me to say I was sure Sharon had been murdered. He gave me the money

to pay you, and a little for myself. I took it. Why not?"

"Why not, Mrs. Delany?" Shayne said. "He hired you to convince me I was looking for a murder. You understand? He didn't give a damn about Sharon. It was Mercori he was after! And it's worked. Mercori has the police after him."

"I didn't know a Mercori, Mr. Shayne."

"Mercori is Menander's real name."

Her eyes burned. "Then I'm glad I got the police after him!"

"You were used, Mrs. Delany, and paid blood money. Your whole purpose, what they paid you for, was to get me to go after Mercori, to look for a murder."

"Was Sharon murdered?" Mary Delany said.

"I don't know. I can't tell the truth from all the faked evidence and yarns I was handed," Shayne said. "But I'm going to find out. Who paid you to hire me?"

The motherly woman looked at her hands. The hands rested in her lap and twisted like small animals looking for food. She looked up at Shayne.

"Larry Ames paid me. He said he wanted to know what happened."

Shayne stared at her. "Ames? Can you prove that?"

"Ask him. I can't prove it, but it's the truth. I never liked him, and I wondered what he was up to, but

I didn't care. Those people killed my child no matter how she died!"

"I can't ask him, Mrs. Delany. He's dead."

She blinked. "Dead?"

"Murdered, Mrs. Delany," Shayne said harshly.

"Then—then Sharon was murdered, too! By the same people. They killed Larry because he was having them investigated. He said he wanted me to hire you because he didn't want to be involved!"

Shayne stood up suddenly and began to pace the neat little room. "Damn it, it doesn't make sense. If Ames wanted to cause trouble, or even find out if someone murdered Sharon, he was acting very strangely. He gives you money to hire me, and then he makes me beat a few facts from him!"

Shayne looked down at the woman. "If he wanted to find who killed Sharon, why didn't he just tell me what I wanted to know? But he didn't. He acted like a man who didn't want to talk. He lied to the police and you about jilting Sharon, and made me beat the truth out of him. Are you lying, Mrs. Delany?"

"No!" she cried. "I swear it, Mr. Shayne. Larry Ames paid me two thousand dollars to hire you. What I didn't have to pay you was mine. He said he wanted to find out who killed Sharon!"

Shayne paced. He was remembering what Josip Mercori had said, that Larry Ames might have

been with Sharon that night at about the time she died. Ames himself could have been the killer, yet he had hired Shayne to find the killer! Not himself, but through the mother.

"All right, Mrs. Delany. The police will want to talk to you sooner or later. For now stay here, and keep your doors locked."

Shayne walked out of the house and returned to his car. He sat in the car for some time smoking a cigarette and staring at the small house of Mrs. Mary Delany. Was she telling the truth? If she was, then Shayne was beginning to have a faint glimmering of what was being done.

He started his engine and drove back toward the tall, elegant apartment house where Sharon Delany had died. The apartment where Lucille Lawson now lived alone, the major witness against Josip Mercori.

XIII

MIKE SHAYNE eased his car into the shadows at the corner. He parked and darkened his lights. In the dark night he lit a cigarette, cupped it carefully, and leaned back against the seat.

From where he had parked he could see the front entrance to the apartment house, and the service entrance that was down a flight of stairs below street level.

Up the block in the other direc-

tion a car was parked. There were no markings, but Shayne knew a police car when he saw one.

A man sat in it. Shayne could see the glow of the other man's cigarette.

Gentry's man was not being too discreet, and was not parked where he could see the side entrance. There was nothing wrong with that. Two guards were with Lucille Lawson inside, the service door was locked from inside, and Gentry's man in the car was there only to watch who came and went, and if anyone should follow Lucille when she came out.

Mike Shayne had other reasons.

The redhead settled down to watch and wait. There were no other ways out of the building.

An hour passed.

Then two hours.

If Shayne's glimmer of an idea were right, something should happen soon. The redhead shifted in his seat and began to wonder if he could have been fooled. Was there any other way out of the tall apartment house? It was modern fire-proof construction with no fire escape and an inside fire stairs instead.

It was almost impossible for a woman to lower herself to the street by a rope. There were no roofs close enough to afford escape. No, Lucille Lawson had to come out the front or the side.

Just before the third hour, Shayne saw it. A man came out the

front entrance on the run. The man ran across the street to the parked police car. Shayne watched the two men talk quickly. The one who had run from the apartment building gestured toward the corner and, probably, the side exit.

At that moment a long black car appeared and turned the corner into the side street toward the side door. The man who had run from the building jumped into the watching car and the car moved off and around the corner behind the big black car.

Mike Shayne watched.

The black car had slowed near the side entrance. Now, as the police car came around the corner, it speeded up and pulled away, and its right rear door opened and slammed shut. The police car went off along the side street after the big black car.

Both disappeared.

Shayne sat and smoked and watched both entrances.

A moment or two later he saw a shadow appear at the top of the stairs from the side entrance. Shayne smiled.

The shadow became a tall woman who walked quickly away in the same direction taken by the black car and the police car. Shayne waited until the woman was half way up the block, then quickly pulled away from the curb, drove to the next side street, turned, and sped to the next main street. He turned left and eased slowly toward

the side street where the woman had been walking.

He reached the corner just before the woman emerged into the light. It was Lucille Lawson. She stepped into a small car parked at the corner, and drove off toward the north. Shayne fell in behind her. They drove for over two miles, and then the small car pulled over to the curb again. Shayne drove slowly past. Lucille Lawson got out of the car and went into a tavern.

Shayne parked up the block. Then he had a feeling, call it a hunch. Lucille Lawson was obviously trying to shake any possible shadowers. Shayne pulled from the curb and turned into the first side street. There was an alley behind the row of buildings in which the tavern was located.

Shayne parked, got out of his car, and stood in the shadows where he could watch the alley. A door opened two minutes later. A woman came out and turned toward Shayne. The redhead ducked back. Lucille Lawson came out of the alley and walked away from where she had parked the small car.

When she was far enough ahead, Shayne went to his car and followed her slowly. As she neared the corner he speeded up like any normal car and reached the corner. Lucille Lawson turned left. Shayne made the turn and drove past her to the next corner. In his rearview mirror he saw the big black car pull

quickly to the curb. Lucille Lawson jumped in.

The big black car roared past Shayne and drove off south. The police car was nowhere in sight. Shayne could guess what had happened. The driver of the black car had managed to let the two policemen see that his car was empty! Maybe the police had stopped the car to be sure. Then the police, realizing they had made an error, had hotfooted it back to the apartment. A neat bit of work.

But not neat enough. Shayne settled down to drive carefully behind the big car. He used all his skill, allowing other cars to come between when he knew there were no logical turnoffs, and twice he pulled ahead and passed the black car when he knew he could make a turnoff and pick the car up again with no danger of losing it.

It was after less than an hour that Shayne knew the black car was leading him close to the mansion of Josip Mercori! And minutes after that the big car pulled up at a deserted intersection that was less than half a mile from Mercori's former headquarters. Shayne, caught as the only other car near, had to drive on past. In his rear-view mirror he watched the big car drive away and come up behind him, and Lucille Lawson stood alone on the deserted corner.

There was a gas station. Shayne turned into the station, the big car roared away and vanished in the

night. Shayne U-turned and nosed out. Lucille Lawson still stood where the big car had dropped her. Shayne realized she was still checking on any pursuit, and also waiting for the big car to be gone. As Shayne watched, Lucille Lawson crossed the road and vanished up a narrow driveway.

Shayne pulled out and drove slowly back to the corner. He parked some hundred yards away from the driveway, and walked carefully back in the shadows of trees. He did not take the driveway, but moved silently under the trees toward a small house at the end of the driveway.

Shayne inched closer to the house in the dark night. There was light in the house, and the shades were not drawn. Through the window Shayne saw the fat figure of Makros Bey, and the smaller shape of Josip Mercori. Shayne grinned to himself, took a step closer—and froze.

A figure crouched in the night at the dark corner of the house. It was Lucille Lawson, and she had a pistol in her hand.

Even as Shayne watched, the woman raised up to peer in at a side window, her pistol aimed inside the room.

Shayne prepared to leap.

XIV

MIKE SHAYNE did not move. Lucille Lawson, after staring for

a moment into the room of the small house, crouched down again in the shadows and made no further move.

Shayne swore under his breath. What the devil was the woman up to? And what were Mercori and Makros Bey doing? They had run less than half a mile from the mansion, and while all the police in Miami were looking for them they stood talking in the living room of an isolated shabby house.

Where was the little gunman, Ben-Anni?

Shayne crouched down in the night, barely breathing. He could attempt to take them, but he actually had nothing against any of them. If he had it was not going to be easy to take them alone. He could not take the Lawson woman without alerting the men in the house, and he could not try for the men in the house and the woman at the same time.

The gas station where he had made the turn was not far off through the trees and from it Shayne could watch the only way out from the house in a car. A big car was parked beside the house. Shayne would have to chance it.

Carefully, slowly, the redhead worked his way backwards until he had reached the road not far from the gas station. He stood and crossed the street quickly. The telephone booth was at the corner of the station building. Shayne could see the faint light in the windows



of the small house through the trees. His eyes on the light, he dialed Gentry's number.

Gentry was not in his office. Shayne swore to himself and asked for Bellows.

"He's out on the street, too, Mr. Shayne," Gentry's assistant said.

"They're both out?" Shayne snapped. "Where?"

"They went on a call. A man named Ben-Anni was found dead on a deserted beach near the bay."

"Ben-Anni? Dead? How?" Shayne demanded.

"Shot, I think," the sergeant said, and there was a silence. "Yes, the call-in said he was shot twice, not where he was found."

Shayne's grey eyes suddenly blazed. "All right. Now listen. Get in touch with Gentry or Bellows wherever they are. Tell them that Josip Mercori and Makros Bey are

in a house on a driveway from the intersection of Ladera Road and Bay Drive. Got that? Tell them to get out here fast. I'll be watching for them. And get that to them at once!"

"They'll have it in ten seconds, Shayne."

Shayne hung up. The light was still on in the small house, and no car had left. Shayne slipped quickly back across the road and into the trees. Ben-Anni shot! Shayne's glimmer of an idea for what the whole affair was about was becoming more than a glimmer. Ames was dead. Ben-Anni dead. Lucille Lawson with a gun and watching Mercori and Makros Bey. He wondered if Lew DiDonna was still alive, and if he was where was he?

Near the house again, Shayne saw that Lucille Lawson had not moved. The shadow of the woman still crouched as a darker shape in the shadows at the corner of the house. Shayne considered if he could capture the woman without alarming the two men. He had only thought about it for a few moments when the lights went out in the house.

The outer door opened and Mercori and Makros Bey stepped out into the night and walked quickly to the big car waiting near the house. Lucille Lawson made no move. Makros Bey carried a pistol. At the car Josip Mercori stopped.

"I am not sure, Makros," Mercori said in a low voice. "I am not

sure I should not give myself up."

"Do not be a fool, Josip!" Bey snapped. "Your enemies will stop at nothing, and you know it. In jail who knows what could happen?"

"The police will protect me."

"You do not know how clever this plot actually is, Josip!" Bey said. "You were there with that girl. I know these Americans. They will lean over backwards to show the world how fair they are by punishing the important man with the insignificant man. How can you prove you did not kill that girl? The American government really does not like you, Josip, and you know that. If this Gentry can fabricate a good case against you, the Federal people will not help you."

Mercori sighed. "I suppose you are right. Still I do not like this running and leaving all my men. And where is Ben-Anni? He should have met us here by now?"

"Either the police have taken him, Josip, or he is under their eyes and is staying away. Ben-Anni is a clever boy despite his youth."

"He should have communicated, Makros," Mercori said.

"We can't wait, Josip. You know the value of time. We've been through this all so many times before. They will not catch us. The Nazi's couldn't take us, nor our good native fascists, nor the degenerate king himself. We're on our wits again, Josip. In a way there is a thrill to it."

"We have been through much,

Makros," Mercori said softly. "Still, I am uneasy this time. There is something strange about it all. Why would that Lawson woman wish to harm me? Who would kill that fool Ames?"

"Your enemies are everywhere, Josip, and we have no time. Come," Makros Bey said. "Once in Brazil we will be safe."

The two men opened the car doors. Shayne, low in the dark, watched them and Lucille Lawson. The woman made no move. Shayne was trapped. He could not move against the two men because that would put the Lawson woman behind him. If he tried to attack the woman, the men would be behind him.

Where was Gentry?

Shayne watched the car start, and still Lucille Lawson just crouched in the dark and watched with her pistol ready but silent. The big car pulled down the driveway. Shayne, helpless, took the license number. Moments later the big car had driven away.

Lucille Lawson stood up. She pocketed her pistol and entered the small house. She came out again almost at once. She held a piece of paper and walked quickly down the driveway. Shayne followed at a careful distance.

Where was Gentry?

Shayne followed Lucille Lawson along the road to another driveway. A car was parked in the driveway not far from where Shayne's car

was hidden in the trees. Lucille Lawson got into the car. Shayne, hidden in the trees, watched her get in and start the motor. He slipped back to his own car.

She pulled out of the driveway and turned north. She drove easily, without hurrying, and Shayne drove behind her. Gentry had not appeared, and Shayne could not wait. If he lost the Lawson woman he would not find Mercori and Bey again.

The redhead had no doubt that, whatever Lucille Lawson was up to, she was on her way to the same destination as Mercori and Bey. Someone had left her directions to follow from the small house.

If Shayne had a chance he would call in to Gentry. But if he did not, then he would have to go it alone. He could not lose Lucille Lawson.

His grey eyes grimly watched the car ahead as it drove easily north and then began to turn west in the night.

XV

IT WAS DAWN when the two cars passed through Mobile. Lucille Lawson continued west. Mike Shayne had little doubt now where she was going. Makros Bey had spoken of Brazil. The Lawson girl was going to New Orleans, where jets left for Brazil.

He maintained his distance, but never lost sight of the car ahead, and wondered how the two fugi-

tives had gotten out of Miami. Whatever their plan, it was apparently a good one, and Shayne had had no chance to call Gentry yet.

The sun was up, and the day was clear and hot, when Shayne followed Lucille Lawson into the outskirts of New Orleans. The airport seemed to shimmer in the sun when Shayne parked in the lot some fifty feet away from Lucille Lawson's car.

The Lawson girl took a small suitcase and walked from the parking lot into the terminal building. Shayne strolled behind her. He had to be careful now. In daylight, and on foot, she could easily recognize him.

She stopped at the Pan-Am reservation desk. She obviously had a reservation. Shayne followed her to a waiting area. The jet leaving from that area was going non-stop to Rio de Janiero.

Shayne went back to the reservation desk and asked for any cancellations. There was a waiting list ahead of him. He asked for the manager and flashed his credentials. The manager was not pleased, but there was a cancellation not yet assigned, and the expectancy of the usual number of "no-shows." Shayne took his ticket, charged on his credit card, and returned to the waiting area.

Lucille Lawson had not moved. The woman was reading a magazine, and obviously did not want to

be seen. Shayne tugged slowly on his left earlobe as he watched her and scanned the faces of the other waiting passengers.

He did not see Mercori or Makros Bey. A heavy-set man with a beard pushed an old man in a wheelchair up to the waiting area. The old man was small and thin. Shayne studied them.

A thin, elderly woman wearing a veil walked into the waiting area with her fat and bearded husband.

Two dark-skinned men who looked like laborers strode into the waiting area. Both wore heavy mustaches; and one was thin and small, the other big and heavy.

A small figure lay alone on a stretcher, two white-suited attendants talking to pretty girls and ignoring their patient. Neither of the attendants was fat.

There were many small, slender men. None of them looked like Mercori, but any of them could be heavily and expertly made up.

Shayne knew that he was going to have to wait for Mercori or Markros Bey, or the Lawson woman, to make a move, if he was to have any proof of his hunch.

At that moment the doors to the entry tunnel opened, and the passengers began to file into the jet. Lucille Lawson did not move. The waiting area was not full. There was still some time before the announced departure time.

Shayne stood up and moved with a large group of passengers

into the entry tunnel. Lucille Lawson had not seen him. On the jet he took his seat and watched the forward doorway. He could not watch the rear entry.

One minute before departure time Shayne had still not seen Mercori or Makros Bey, but Lucille Lawson came aboard as the last passenger to board through the forward entry.

The doors closed. The jet began to taxi away across the sunny airport, its jets thundering.

The giant craft moved slowly and ponderously like some awkward bird not at home on the ground. It reached the head of the runway and stopped. Three minutes passed. Then the four big engines began to roar and throb as the power built up to a crescendo. The jet shook, and began to move. It thundered down the runway and then lifted, and suddenly leaped upward in its steep climb.

Mike Shayne was on his way to Rio.

Lucille Lawson sat quietly not far ahead of Shayne, the small suitcase in her lap.

Shayne, hidden behind a newspaper, let his grey eyes look slowly and carefully around. He did not see Mercori or Makros Bey ahead of him. Both men would recognize him. A handkerchief covering his lower face, he quickly glanced around behind him.

He did not spot his quarry.

Shayne had a problem. If he



walked through the jet he stood a better chance of being spotted than he had of spotting them. Yet if he remained in his seat he would not find his men. Unless he watched only Lucille Lawson and waited for some contact.

The jet was now well out over the sea on its way to Brazil. If Shayne had made a mistake, if Lucille Lawson were a decoy, then there was no chance of catching Mercori and Bey. But Shayne was sure he had made no mistake. Someone had killed Ben-Anni, and that would not have been Josip Mercori. Whatever plan was going on, it was not Josip Mercori's plan.

Then it happened.

Shayne was about to take the risk of walking back through the giant jet, when a man walked past him, going toward the front of the jet. It was the fat and bearded husband of the thin woman who had worn a veil in the waiting area.

Shayne watched the fat man and knew that he had found Makros Bey. Lucille Lawson looked up casually as the fat man passed her. The man turned his head a fraction. Lucille Lawson gave a tiny nod.

Makros Bey walked on toward the front.

XVI

MIKE SHAYNE opened his suit jacket and rested his hand on his automatic. Somewhere behind him Josip Mercori sat disguised as a woman with a veil.

Makros Bey had reached the front of the big jet now. As the fat man approached the door into the pilot's cabin, a stewardess stepped out in his way. The stewardess smiled at Bey and said something, her head shaking negatively. She was telling the fat man that he could not go into the pilot's compartment.

As Shayne watched the smile froze on the face of the stewardess. The smile became a rigid grimace. Shayne could not see Makros Bey's hands, but from the set of the fat man's arm it was clear what was happening.

Makros Bey had a pistol pointed at the stewardess, and hidden from anyone else.

The stewardess blinked and hesitated. But Shayne knew what she would do. In flight the stewardess could not risk gunfire, or panic, or any kind of fight.

Shayne watched the tableaux at the door of the pilot's cabin, and he saw Lucille Lawson suddenly stand and walk to the rest room. She carried the small suitcase.

It had all taken only seconds. Makros Bey still stood at the door of the pilot's cabin. Lucille Lawson was in the wash room. The stewardess had now turned to open the door into the pilot's cabin.

Mike Shayne moved.

He walked quickly to the door of the rest room. It was located beside a small, curtained stewardess's area. Shayne slipped behind the curtain.

The big jet suddenly shuddered in the air. There was a gasp from the crowd of passengers. Then they all gripped their seats as the jet leaned over in a long, sweeping turn. When it came out of the turn, Shayne knew that the plane was now headed for some other destination than Brazil.

Lucille Lawson stepped out of the ladies' room just as a stewardess and an officer who had been at the rear came rushing forward, alarm on their faces.

"Stop! Right there!" Lucille Lawson said.

She held an assembled submachine gun. The two crew members stopped in their tracks and stared at Lucille Lawson. Some women began to scream as they saw the ugly submachine gun in the Lawson woman's hands. Two men jumped up.

"Down!" Lucille Lawson snapped. "Everyone remain calm and seated. There is no danger if you behave yourselves. This plane is changing destination. No one will be harmed."

The two men sat down. The women covered their mouths in fear. Then, slowly, far to the rear a small old woman stood up. Lucille Lawson watched this woman, her machine gun pointed at him.

Mike Shayne jumped.

Momentarily distracted by watching the woman far to the rear, Lucille Lawson never saw Shayne lunge out of the curtained area at her shoulder. He closed one big hand on the submachine gun. His other fist hit Lucille Lawson on the point of the chin. Her head snapped back and Shayne caught her in one arm as she fell. His other hand held the submachine gun. Lucille Lawson collapsed unconscious in his arm.

Shayne lowered her to the floor and looked at the officer.

"Get her in that curtained area and tie her," Shayne snapped. "There's a man up with the captain. We may have to let him make us land wherever he's going."

A small figure stood over the redhead. Shayne straightened up with the submachine gun in his hand. Josip Mercori had taken off his dress and disguise and stood now in the same suit Shayne had seen last night.

"You will not believe me, Mr.

Shayne," Mercori said, "but I know nothing about this. I did not know this woman was aboard."

Shayne nodded. "I believe you, Mercori. This whole affair was aimed at you. You're the target. How much money do they get if they return you home?"

"I believe it would total some one hundred thousand dollars in all," Mercori said, and said, "yes, I see. One hundred thousand dollars, if I am returned alive to be shot. My longtime friend, Makros Bey."

"He's no friend now."

Mercori stared at nothing. "Twenty-eight years we have shared our lives. Now—Where do you think he is taking us, Mr. Shayne?"

"You tell me, Mercori? He can't reach home, so where can he deliver you to a government who would be sure to return you?"

Mercori nodded. "Portugal, I expect. They would probably send me back on extradition. I am a convicted traitor, and Salazar is sympathetic to the present regime."

"We can't make Portugal," the plane's officer said.

The stewardess said, "The Azores we can."

"The Azores Islands," Mercori said. "Yes, that would be the same thing. They are part of Portugal."

Shayne looked at Josip Mercori, then at all the passengers who were watching the whole scene in fascinated fear.

The redhead said: "Okay. Let's try."

Shayne walked forward with Mercori behind him. The stewardess and ship's officer talked softly to the passengers. Shayne had his automatic out. Mercori had drawn a pistol.

Shayne listened at the door of the pilot's cabin. Somehow he had to open it. It did not open from outside.

The redhead motioned to the officer, whispered:

"Get in there somehow. Go in slowly."

The officer nodded. Shayne motioned to Mercori.

"Stand behind the officer. Let Makros Bey see you. He needs you alive. He thinks the Lawson woman has the cabin under control. He'll hesitate to shoot."

Mercori nodded. Shayne lay flat on the floor in the aisle, his head just behind Mercori's feet. He would have one shot, and if he missed he could crash the jet.

The officer knocked. "Sir! Trouble here. A woman has a gun on us. I have to come in. I know there is a man in with you, my hands will be up."

There was a breathless silence. Then the door clicked and swung open. The officer stepped in with his hands up. On the floor Shayne located Makros Bey against the other wall with his eyes on both the door and the pilot at the same time. Bey held a gun.

The officer stepped in and moved quickly left.

Makros Bey saw Mercori.

The fat man stared at Mercori for a split second, his eyes blinking with an instant's confusion.

Shayne held his automatic in both hands and fired from the floor.

Makros Bey was hurled back against the wall, and his eyes widened. He raised his pistol, tried to fire, but crashed forward on his face.

The captain and first officer just looked at Mike Shayne, and then the big jet made a slow, sweeping turn and started back toward New Orleans.

Shayne stood up. "Miami is closer now, Captain."

"Miami then," the captain said.

Shayne went back to pick up Lucille Lawson. Josip Mercori stood looking down at Makros Bey, who lay dead in a pool of blood from Shayne's single shot in his heart.

XVII

CHIEF WILL GENTRY stared after Lucille Lawson as the woman was taken from his office. Shayne sat and did not look toward where the woman had vanished through Gentry's door.

"I don't know what we can get her for," Gentry said slowly. "Attempted piracy on that jet, I suppose. It'll put her away a long time. There's no real proof against her

for complicity in the murders, even if she told us just about all of it."

Shayne watched space. "All because Makros Bey wanted the blood money for his chief's head."

"A hundred thousand is a lot of money," Gentry said, "but it wasn't just the money. Twenty-eight years of playing second fiddle, and not getting what he thought he deserved. He'd lost faith in Mercori, and decided to turn him in before someone else did."

"And he couldn't really do it unless he got Mercori alone with just himself," Shayne said. "All the other men Mercori had were faithful. No one could get close to Mercori to snatch him. I tried and I didn't make it. But the police could break him loose if they had a reason. It was a hell of a good plan."

"Bey in it all alone until he got his sweetie, the Lawson girl, to help," Gentry said. "A real set-up. How did you first tumble, Mike?"

"All at once," Shayne said. "They had me going good until we tried to arrest Mercori. When he got away with Bey, it all suddenly seemed wrong. Your men wouldn't have missed those heel marks, so they had to have been made after you had gone over the apartment, and that meant they had been made for my benefit."

"After I realized that all the rest was as phony as a three-dollar bill. They all said they knew nothing, yet everyone blurted out some lead to the idea that Mercori had killed

Sharon. It was a set-up, pure and simple."

"They'd all been paid to give you clues and leads," Gentry said.

Shayne nodded. "Sharon had really been fired from that musical show, and she really called Mercori about it. But that was the day before her death. Bey got the big idea from that. He arranged for DiDonna to fire her, and brought Ames into the deal. Ames was greedy, so it was okay with him."

"Ames actually killed Sharon," Gentry mused, "and then Bey killed him."

"It was all part of a double plan," Shayne said. "Killing Ames got rid of him, and it also made me sure the whole case was something Mercori wanted to hush up. That was all Bey wanted—just that the police go to arrest Mercori and bust him loose from his loyal men."

"What happened to Ben-Anni?"

Shayne shrugged. "We'll never know, but it's a million-to-one that Bey shot him. Ben-Anni was loyal to Mercori."

Gentry chewed on his cigar. "So Bey and Lawson had two people killed, probably killed a third, all to get Mercori alone on a jet they could divert to the Azores."

"It was the only way Bey could ever have gotten Mercori alone like that. The whole act of keeping me away was just designed to make me suspicious, and it worked."

"Until they went too far," Gen-

try said. "They really didn't have to leave that physical evidence of the high heels."

"Killers always go too far," Shayne said.

Gentry nodded moodily. In the silence of the Chief's big office, neither man spoke for some time.

"You know," Shayne said at

last, "I should have known when Ames was killed, but the killer missed me. That shooting was very good. I should have been hit. But my mind was on a great big cover-up by Mercori. It damned near worked, Will."

"But it didn't," Will Gentry said, and smiled at Mike Shayne.



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LOUIS RILEY



*He saw Big Lefty's cruel black eyes, and he remembered:
"When it's the devil's dice—Death is the only winner!"*

I HELD THE dice cup high and rattled it loudly so all could see and hear, then sent the cubes hurtling against the backstop to watch them come up seven, as I knew they would. It was my seventh pass in a row and I had gathered in better than twelve hundred dollars in the past few minutes. It was now time to quit.

The prearranged idea now was for Little Manuel, who was near the backstop, to scoop up the dice in suspicious anger, examine them closely to see if they were loaded—

which they were—make a fast switch and throw the new and legitimate pair against the backstop, as though testing them for their authenticity as he pocketed mine, the crooked ones I had been using.

He was to do this after the seventh pass, and he did so. The dice he threw out cropped up a four and everyone seemed satisfied that they were not crooked. Of course, they could not know that I had a thing going with Little Manuel.

Somebody tossed me the dice and said, "Your game, yet, Pal."

The eager and apprehensive faces surrounding the table looked at me to see what I was going to shoot this time. I had been betting fairly heavy the last few passes and some of the boys had dropped a considerable bundle. It was now time for the trouble.

I pushed the dice away and shook my head.

"I've had it, boys," I said. "I'm cutting out for tonight."

A heavy silence came over the group. They peered at me as though I were some kind of disease.

A meaningful voice nearby said quietly, "Oh, no, you're not." It was Lefty Syl. "You're not leaving right now," he said. "Not when you're so hot and you took in so much dough."

I singled him out. He was just a few feet away. I stepped up to him and said in his face, "Yes, I am. And I don't think there is anybody here that can stop me." I opened my jacket to display the thirty-eight I had stuck in my belt.

Lefty sneered at it.

"That pea shooter don't scare me," he snorted. He opened his own jacket to show his weapon. It was a forty-five automatic. He caressed the butt of the rod with his fingers. "There are a lot of guys laying around in the graveyard," he said, "that would tell you about this piece of ordinance. When this baby hits them—"

Lefty Syl shrugged.

I looked around at the other

men present. Their faces were all tense, but they just stood about as though nothing was going on. Little Manuel purposely ignored me: he did not want to give himself away. According to the plan, we were to split my winnings later. If anyone tumbled to him now, we would both be dead ducks.

Turning my attention back to the cold-eyed Lefty, I said, "Just one fine minute, my friend." I made my voice gruff. "I'm beginning to get the idea that you are trying to threaten me."

He stuck his ugly puss in mine.

"I want to tell you something, pal," he said, "I don't threaten nobody. When I make a threat it is not considered a threat. It is considered a statement of fact!"

Solomn Sol, the guy who had promoted the loft we were playing in, stepped in between us and pushed us apart.

"Listen, you guys," said Sol, "I don't want any fireworks in here. What do you want to do, jam it up for everybody?"

He looked us each sternly in the eye. "I know both you boys happen to be tough cookies, but if you louse up this joint with a shooting you're going to bring the law pounding on the door. A thing like that would get back to the syndicate and the big boys would become very unhappy. And the survivor of this little fracas will find himself in some very hot water, immediately."

Lefty Syl seemed to cool off a



bit, but he still kept his hand on his gun.

"All right," he said to Sol. "But this punk's got to give us another chance to get even, or at least a chance to get some of our dough back."

Solomn Sol looked at me to see how I took it.

I said, "I resent being called a punk, but if I am one, all I can say is it takes one to know one."

Sol stepped between us again just as Lefty was going through the motion of drawing his cannon. "Now I'm going to tell you fellows again, I don't want no noise up here. Go ten blocks away and settle it. Go anywhere and settle it. But don't bring any heat by settling it here!"

I glared at Lefty.

He glared at me.

Finally, he looked around at everyone and said, "I make a motion that he shoots one more time for high stakes and then he can go to hell whether he wins or loses. Do I hear anybody second the motion?"

There was a mumbling throughout the group as they considered the proposition. Eventually, all heads save Little Manuel's nodded yes.

"Wait a minute," I protested hotly. "I never seen no crap game conducted by rules like this. What's with this motion bit?"

"We just took a vote," said Lefty. "You're going to shoot one more time, and you're going to shoot high."

I looked around again at all the mugs. Their faces were hard, all except Little Manuel's. His had a hopeless expression on it. I gave him a reassuring glance, as if to say, "If I lose this time, we can do it again later in another game." He seemed to get the idea and gave an almost imperceptible shrug of his narrow shoulders.

I took out my roll of bills and tossed them on the table. There was fourteen hundred dollars there.

Lefty scooped up the dice and handed them to me. I put them in the cup and made a few tentative shakes.

"Wait a minute," Lefty shouted. "I want to make sure all bets are down!"

My money was covered immediately. The beady-eyed Lefty was betting like crazy on the side that I would crap out. He was getting tremendous odds. He claimed that the delay in my shooting had made my luck defunct. I looked at him disgustedly. I knew Little Manuel would have given me anything to slip me the crooked dice then, but there wasn't a prayer.

Finally, all bets were settled. There was a lot of cash riding on

my next throw, and you could almost sense the electricity in the smoky atmosphere.

Okay. Once more I raised the cup high and shook it loudly for all to see and hear. I also made sure they seen the scowl on my face, but these guys couldn't care less. So I smirked and cast the galloping dominoes so hard against the back-board that they bounded back within my reach.

And came up snake eyes! I had crapped out!

Lefty was jumping jubilantly up and down as he collected his money. From where I stood, it looked like quite a bit, what with all the odds he got on my crapping out. As a matter of fact, it broke up the game. Lefty had just about cleaned everyone out. Nobody was able to fade the outrageous sums he wanted to shoot. So the game broke up.

I had picked up the errant snake-eyes and said I wanted the damn things for a souvenir. I slipped them in my pocket, their beady eyes still glowering at me.

We all filed downstairs, hearing Lefty bragging at the top of his voice to Solomn Sol. A lot of those boys hated Lefty then as they trundled down the steep steps from the loft. Personally, I had my own opinion.

Downstairs, in the dark street I talked to Little Manuel.

"Next time," I told him, "I'll announce that I am going to quit on the sixth pass. Then, when they yelp, I'll tell them that I'll shoot one more time, win, lose or whatever. You palm the dice after that last throw and then we got it made. There won't be any sore losers. They won't be claiming that they didn't have a chance to redeem their money.

Little Manuel's face said that it was a better idea than we had in the first place, and why in the hell didn't we think of it before?

I left him on the corner and took a cab.

In the back seat of the taxi I took out the dice I had thrown craps with and idly tossed them on the seat covers. Each time they came up snake-eyes. Lefty Syl was as good a switch man as Little Manuel.

When I met Lefty a little while later at our rendezvous, he wanted to know if I thought Little Manuel would ever get wise.

Before I answered him I put my half of the take in my pocket.

"No, I don't think so, Lefty," I said. "At any rate, I'm going to use him in a legitimate little game I got set up next week. Suckers like him are hard to find."

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WHO'S



I SAID, "My name is Sherlock Holmes."

The two detectives looked at one another.

"Come again?" one of them said.
I puffed my black clay pipe.
"Sherlock Holmes," I said dis-

AFRAID OF SHERLOCK HOLMES?

The inspector glared at me, at my cape and magnifying glass and my two-way hat. "Who's this kook?" he demanded. "My name is Sherlock Holmes," I said modestly . . .

by **BILL PRONZINI**

tinctly. "Now would you be so kind as to remove that light from my eyes?"

The tall, thin detective lowered his flashlight. "Just what are you doing back here?"

"Looking for clues," I said.

"How's that?"

"Clues, my good man, clues." I took my magnifying glass from the pocket of my waistcoat and peered at the red brick of the warehouse wall. "Hmm," I said. "Interesting, don't y'know?"

"A nut, Charley," the short, pudgy detective whispered behind me. "Look at the outfit he's wearing."

The other one said, "Inspector Morris is going to want a word with him, just the same." Then, in a louder tone, "Come along with us, pal."

"I will not," I said irritably, whirling to face him. I jabbed a finger at his nose. "How will I be able

to unearth any clues if I come with you? Run along, now, like good fellows."

They exchanged glances again.

"Look, pal," the one named Charley said, "there's a man inside named Inspector Morris; and he's in charge here. You know what's good for you, you'll come in and tell your story to him. *Capisci?*"

"He is from the Yard, I presume?"

"The Yard?"

"Scotland Yard," I said.

"Scotland Yard?" the pudgy detective repeated.

I adjusted my gray cloak.

"I am always most happy to assist Scotland Yard," I said. "Proceed, gentlemen."

After a third exchange of looks between the two detectives, I was led down the darkened alleyway and through a side door into the warehouse. To the left was a small, glass-enclosed office, brightly lit.

Inside was a graying man in a blue business suit, and an elderly, stooped citizen wearing a brown khaki uniform.

I preceded the two detectives into the office. The graying man had been seated on the edge of a scarred, unfinished wooden desk. He turned as we entered.

I watched his eyes widen as he saw me. He looked at the detectives. "Who the hell is *this*?"

"Sherlock Holmes," the pudgy detective said.

The graying man glared at him. "Bad jokes I don't need, Fred."

"Ask him," Fred said, shrugging.

"Who are you, mister?" the graying man asked me.

"Sherlock Holmes," I said. "At your service. And who might you be, sir?"

"Inspector Morris," he said, scowling. "And I'll ask the questions here. You just do the answering."

"Bah," I said.

"What?"

"You are impertinent, sir," I said. "The name of your superior, please?"

"My what?"

"Your superior," I said. "I shall report you presently."

"I suppose you know the chief?"

"I have many acquaintances at the Yard," I said stiffly.

Inspector Morris looked at the two detectives. "Where did you find this kook?"

"Out back," Charley said.

"Looking for clues," Fred said.

"Clues?"

"With a magnifying glass," Fred said.

"As if I ain't got enough troubles," Inspector Morris said, "now I got to contend with kooks. Get him out of here."

"Maybe we ought to search him first," Charley said.

"What for?"

"Well, he was out back there."

"It was two men robbed this place," Inspector Morris said. He glanced at the elderly man who was sitting in a chair to one side of the desk.

"Did you ever see this character before, Mr. Bennett?"

Mr. Bennett was staring at me. He shook his head.

"You got a good look at the two guys who slugged you?"

"Oh, sure," Mr. Bennett said. "He ain't one of them."

"You positive?"

"Do you think I'd forget a face like his?"

"I beg your pardon?" I said.

"You know, he does sort of look like Sherlock Holmes," Mr. Bennett said.

"Sherlock Holmes ain't a real person," Fred said.

"I mean the guy who played him in the pictures."

"Basil Rathbone?" Fred offered.

"Yeah, that's the one."

"Who is Basil Rathbone?" I asked.

"I still think we ought to search him," Charley said.

"What the hell for?" Inspector Morris said.

"He could be an accomplice."

"Accomplice, indeed!" I said indignantly.

"So all right, search him," Inspector Morris said. "My God!"

Charley came forward.

"Now see here!" I said. "I will not tolerate—"

Charley began to pat the pockets of my waistcoat. I raised my walking stick.

"Unhand me, sir!" I shouted, menacing the stick.

Charley stepped back and drew his revolver.

"Put that damned thing away!" Inspector Morris yelled.

"He's trying to hide something," Charley said, holstering the revolver.

"I have nothing to hide," I said.

"Yeah?" Charley said.

"Bah," I said.

"Say," Mr. Bennett said, laughing, "if you're Sherlock Holmes, where's Dr. Watson?"

I lowered my head and took off my checked cloth cap. I held it over my heart.

"Passed on," I said sadly. "Gone to his reward. Heart attack, don't y'know? All quite sudden."

"Empty your pockets, Holmes," Charley said, glaring at me.

"For what reason, sir?"

"I want to see what you're carrying."

"I am carrying nothing but my magnifying lens and a tin of throat lozenges."

"We'll see about that." Charley rushed forward, catching me unprepared, and quickly ran his hands over my clothing. Then he stepped back. "He's clean." His voice held disappointment.

"Of course I'm clean," I said crossly. "I bathe regularly, you know."

Mr. Bennett snickered.

Charley said angrily, "Let's see your wallet."

"I have no wallet," I told him.

"Where do you live, Holmes?" Fred put in.

"Two-twenty-one on B Baker Street," I said.

"This city?"

"London."

"Where you living here?"

I told him the location of my rented room.

"What are you doing in this country?" Charley asked.

"I am here on confidential business."

"Yeah?" Charley said. "Well, maybe when we get you downtown you'll—"

"All right!" Morris yelled. "Now that's enough! Now that is just about all I can take. What the hell's the matter with all of you? We got a robbery to investigate. Six thousand dollars was stolen from the safe and Mr. Bennett here was knocked over the head. And what do you do? Waste time with this

bat-head who thinks he's Sherlock Holmes?"

"But I am Sherlock Holmes," I said.

"Oh, hell," Inspector Morris said tiredly. "Look, what are you doing here anyway?"

"The same as you, I expect," I said.

"The robbery?"

"Precisely."

He scowled. "How did you know about it?"

"I have a short-wave radio," I told him.

"Sherlock Holmes never had no short-wave radio," Mr. Bennett said.

"Progress, my good man," I said off-handedly.

"You figured out who the guilty parties is yet?" Mr. Bennett said, smiling.

"Of course."

"Oh?" Inspector Morris said, interested. "Who are they?"

"The Red-Headed League, of course."

"Who?"

"The Red-Headed League," I repeated. "Led by the infamous Professor Moriarty, no doubt."

"Red-Headed League?" Inspector Morris said. "Professor Moriarty?"

"Arch villains," I said. "Been battling them all my life. I'll get them in the end. Justice shall be done."

"Oh, Lord," Inspector Morris said. He looked at Charley and

Fred. "Get him out of here. Right now!"

Before I could respond, I was roughly grasped by each arm and propelled through the warehouse to the front door, where I was unceremoniously pushed outside.

"Damned nut," Charley said from the doorway.

"Bah," I said.

The door slammed.

I returned to the rooming house where I had rented a room upon my arrival in town some two weeks before. The landlady, Mrs. Loughery, was cooling herself on the front stoop.

"Evening, Mr. Holmes," she said guardedly.

"Good evening," I answered brusquely.

"Did you have a nice walk?"

"No!" I snapped. "Blasted Scotland Yard. Professor Moriarty escaped again."

"That's too bad."

"Indeed."

I went to my room, drank a cup of coffee, and promptly fell sound asleep in the chair.

TWO NIGHTS LATER I was listening to my short-wave radio when the police dispatcher's voice announced the theft of several valuable mink and ermine stoles from a local furrier. I donned my cloak and checked cap and hurried downstairs.

One of my neighbors, a noxious little man with a face like an emaci-



ated fox, caught my arm in the hallway.

"Off again, eh, Sherlock?" he said. His grin was nasty.

I rapped his knuckles smartly with my walking stick.

"You are impeding justice, sir."

His face went white.

"Damned maniac!" he muttered, rubbing his injured hand. "You ought to be locked up!"

I stuck my tongue out at him.

When I arrived at the furrier's, I entered through a rear door when the patrolman on guard there had his back turned. I spied Inspector Morris standing with the detective named Charley near one of the fur racks.

I tapped my stick sharply on the floor.

"Good evening, gentlemen," I said.

They turned. "Oh, my God!" Inspector Morris said. "Not you again!"

I sniffed the air, my nose twitching.

"Professor Moriarty has been here!" I announced. "I would know the odor of his favorite cologne anywhere!"

Charley clenched his fists. "Listen, you big pain in the—"

"I remind you, sir," I said archly, "of whom you are addressing."

"Let's not get started again," Inspector Morris said, shaking his graying head in disgust. "Just throw him out, Charley."

Charley smiled, none too pleasantly.

I was thrown out. More literally, I may add, than figuratively.

The following evening I went for a long walk. When I returned, Mrs. Loughery was waiting outside my door.

"There was two cops here asking questions about you," she said.

"Cops?" I said, frowning.

"From the detective squad," Mrs. Loughery said. "A tall, skinny one and a short, fat one."

"Ah," I said. "Charley and Fred."

Mrs. Loughery bobbed her head. "That's what they called each other."

"What was the nature of their visit?"

"They wanted to know who you was."

"Who I am?" I said. "They know perfectly well who I am."

"Yeah," Mrs. Loughery said, giving me a queer look. "Well, natu-

rally, I told them you was Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

I nodded perfunctorily.

She moistened her narrow mouth. "I hope you don't mind, but I had to let 'em look at your room. They was kind of insistent."

"Quite all right," I said. "But how extraordinary! What could they have been looking for, I wonder?"

"Don't know," Mrs. Loughery said. "I was standing there the whole time they was looking. House rules, you know. But they didn't take nothing. I can tell you that."

I tugged at my ear.

"This is most irregular," I said. "I shall have to inquire at the Yard."

"Sure," Mrs. Loughery said. "You do that, Mr. Holmes." She hurried off down the hall.

I went downstairs and found a telephone booth. I put through a call to Inspector Morris.

"Holmes here," I said when he answered.

"Who?" he asked.

"Sherlock Holmes," I told him testily. "I wish to know why two of your men were investigating my room."

"Because I sent them," the inspector said. "Listen, you bat-head, I don't want you coming around to any more robberies. You got that?"

"I shall do whatever I think is necessary to apprehend Professor Moriarty."

"I'm warning you, now," In-

spector Morris said. "I'll have you locked up."

"You would arrest me?"

"You're damn right I will."

"If you do, sir, I promise to sue for false arrest. I have many acquaintances at Scotland Yard who most—"

"Ah, the hell with it!" Inspector Morris said, and hung up.

THURSDAY EVENING there was another robbery in the city. A large supermarket was broken into, entrance having been gained through a skylight, and several thousand dollars was taken from the manager's safe.

The moment I arrived at the supermarket, I was subjected by the detective named Charley to some rather abusive language. But quite suddenly, Charley was drawn aside by Inspector Morris. Although they apparently felt they were out of earshot, I managed nonetheless to overhear their conversation.

"Why don't you just have this bird locked away?" Charley said. "He belongs in a squirrel cage somewhere."

"Don't think I wouldn't like to," Inspector Morris said. "But I've been thinking it over. It's not a good idea."

"I don't get you."

"Listen, it wouldn't be any problem to have him put away. But think of the consequences. There'd be a hearing, right? And we'd have to testify."

"Sure," Charley agreed, frowning.

"Don't you see?" Inspector Morris said. "The papers would get ahold of it. And you know what would happen then."

"No," Charley said.

"They'd make us look like idiots, that's what," the inspector said. "Can't you see the headlines? COPS ARREST SHERLOCK HOLMES. Wouldn't that go over big with the chief? They'd make it sound like we've got nothing better to do than go around collaring kooks. Hell, the public would laugh themselves sick."

"Yeah," Charley said. "I see what you mean."

"The big city papers would probably get on it, too. And then the wire services. The whole damn country would be laughing. At us. That kind of notoriety we don't need. We got enough problems."

Charley nodded slowly.

"The way I see it," Inspector Morris said, "putting up with Sherlock there is the lesser of the two evils. I mean, he's harmless enough. He just pokes around and looks through that damned glass of his."

"You mean we just let him tag along to every robbery we investigate?"

"That's about it," Inspector Morris said. "As long as he just keeps looking for that Professor Moriarty of his, and stays out of our way, we'll humor him. We won't pay any attention to him."

"Okay," Charley said, a bit dubiously. "If you say so."

Inspector Morris nodded emphatically. "I say so."

The good inspector was true to his word. There were three robberies in the month following the supermarket theft. At each of these, I was judiciously ignored. An eye was kept warily on my presence, to be sure, but other than that I was allowed to examine whatever I chose with my glass. I rather think, after a time, that Inspector Morris was becoming used to having me around.

On the fifth of the following month, Bennington's Jewelry Store was burglarized.

I arrived moments after Inspector Morris. Both Charley and Fred were present on this occasion, and each favored me with his usual scowl. I extended greetings, which were ignored, and set about examining the glass display cases of jewelry.

Five minutes later a portly gentleman in a rumpled suit and an ill-fitting hairpiece arrived. He was obviously distraught.

"This is terrible!" he said, wringing his hands. "This is just awful!"

"Mind taking an inventory for us, Mr. Cooley?" Inspector Morris asked him. "We'd like to know what's missing."

"Yes, yes, certainly," Mr. Cooley answered. Then he saw me. "Who is this person?"

"Don't pay any attention to

him," Inspector Morris said. "Just take the inventory, please."

Mr. Cooley went through a curtained doorway into the rear of the store. He was gone several seconds, and then emerged and began to dart down the aisles of display cases, scribbling furiously on a pad. Suddenly he stopped before a large, seemingly inconspicuous case.

"Oh!" he said, his voice filled with anguish. "Oh, oh, *oh!*"

"What is it?" Inspector Morris asked, joining him.

"It's gone!" Mr. Cooley wailed. "It's *gone!*"

"What's gone?"

"The Kubaugh necklace!" Mr. Cooley said. "Oh, this is terrible! Terrible!"

Charley came up to them. "What's the Kubaugh necklace?"

"Our most exquisite piece," Mr. Cooley said. "It is kept in this case with several less expensive items, as a precautionary measure. But it's gone!"

"How much is it worth?" Inspector Morris asked.

"Fifty thousand dollars!" Mr. Cooley said.

Inspector Morris whistled softly. "Were any of the cheaper items taken from the case?"

"No, none."

"The thieves must have known what they were after, then," Inspector Morris said. "What else is missing?"

"A few insignificant items," Mr. Cooley said. "Perhaps a couple of



thousand dollars worth. But the Kubaugh necklace! A catastrophe, that's what it is!"

"Aha!" I said. I was kneeling on the floor, peering at the boards through my magnifying glass.

They all looked at me.

"The Red-Headed League!" I shouted. "And Professor Moriarty leading them, I'll wager!"

"Who is this man?" Mr. Cooley asked.

"I must hurry," I said, leaping to my feet. "I must follow Moriarty while the trail is still fresh."

I rushed to the door. "I shall call you when I have him in custody," I said to Inspector Morris.

He closed his eyes.

"I'm off!" I shouted, and dashed outside.

I turned left and walked briskly up the street. When I reached the corner, I turned left again. Halfway down the block, I stopped. I put my hand in the pocket of my waist-coat.

And I smiled.

The Kubaugh necklace felt very cool to the touch.

And why not? I reflected. It was ice, after all.

I crossed the street and turned down the nearest alleyway. There, I took off the gray cloak and the checked cloth cap and the false hawk nose and the black waistcoat. I put them, together with the walking stick, into a trash barrel beneath several papers.

I smiled again.

"So long, Holmes," I said. "Rest in peace."

I walked through the alley to the next street.

I doubted if the police would be too terribly unhappy when Sherlock Holmes suddenly vanished. In fact, I imagined they would be quite overjoyed.

As for the Kubaugh necklace, it would be listed amongst the items stolen in the robbery. Sherlock Holmes, for the moment at least, would not be suspected of having deftly slipped it into his pocket while in plain sight of three representatives of the city's finest.

There was the possibility, of course, that the good inspector might eventually put two and two

together. But should that happen, I would be many, many miles from this city. And there would be no way I could be traced or identified.

A lot of trouble to steal a piece of jewelry, you say? Perhaps. But there *were* extenuating circumstances.

You see, even a man in my profession can become bored with his work, the everlasting sameness of planning and carrying out the conventional robbery.

And just like the average man, engaged in average employment, he needs a change, a challenge as it were to relieve the pressures and stimulate the mind when that happens.

In my case, that challenge had been executing a new and totally different kind of crime.

And I had done it.

I felt exhilarated. I was no longer, to use a colloquialism, in a rut, and I would now be able to return quite happily to my normal methods of operation.

What they say is true, you know.

Variety is, indeed, the spice of life.

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The killings, which blasted open an unbelievable web of crime and corruption in Kansas City, Missouri, resulted from an obscure event some thirty months earlier.

On October 19, 1930, a notori-

ous bank robber named Frank "Jelly" Nash escaped from the federal penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas.

The escape was routine, a walk-away by a trusty who never should have been allowed the freedom he gained through scheming and conniving. He was a career criminal with connections in every major city from coast to coast, a thug, hoodlum, gunman, burglar, murderer, and Jack-of-all-underworld-trades.

Nash was permitted to go outside the walls of the penitentiary on various duties but still within the

Long and bloody were the gang wars of Chicago in the twenties. A veritable who's who of murder formed the supporting cast, the infamous ones who fought and died under the bullet-torn banners of Capone, Pretty Boy Floyd in Kansas City, Clyde and Ma Barker in the Oklahoma territory. In succeeding issues of "Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine," famed crime writer David Mazroff will re-create for you some of those characters and the incredible way they lived and died. You'll meet a host of ghostly merchants of evil who killed and ravaged so that their vice lords might prosper and live. Watch for these big true feature stories!



area of the institution. One day, when he went out the last gate he just kept on going, and where he went led him to a tempestuous death, an end which also brought about the murder of two police officers, a police chief, and an agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The simultaneous killings were wantonly carried out by Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd, *who had been hired to aid Nash*.

"Pretty Boy" was so named by a two-buck prostitute on 14th Street in Kansas City.

He wasn't pretty. He had a hard, cruel face and the cold eyes of a shark. The young harlot Floyd selected in the house recognized him and was terrified. Eager to please him lest he turn on her, she flattered him.

"Come along, Pretty Boy," she said, taking hold of his hand.

Adam Richetti, Floyd's pal, who was with him in the parlor, let out a whoop. "Pretty Boy! Wow!"

The girl, slender, curved, with auburn hair and blue eyes, and still in possession of a youthful glow, turned to Richetti. "He is too pretty. Much prettier than you."

"Sure, sure, Honey," Richetti replied. "But watch him. He's liable to steal your pants."

Floyd glowered at his partner. "You're a real funny guy, Banana Face. Keep your tongue still or you'll wake up some day without it."

Richetti grinned back good-naturedly. "Take him upstairs, Honey. He's got a hot temper and needs to get rid of it. I'm sure you're the gal to do it."

The girl may have guessed at the truth of Richetti's words, but what she didn't know was that Floyd was a maniacal killer, a bum without compassion, mercy, or the slightest regard for human life. He robbed and killed, killed senselessly.

Charles Arthur Floyd was born and grew up on a small farm around Sallisaw, Oklahoma, one of seven children. The family was poor, sharecroppers, like all the others in that section. At sixteen, he quit school, or was tossed out, having completed the sixth grade only because each previous teacher wanted to get rid of him and so passed him on.

He worked on his father's farm until he was eighteen, when his father kicked him out. The old man was sick and tired of feeding him and of his constant drinking. A share-crop arrangement was made and Floyd became a part of the beaten group of farmers who barely eked out an existence. At that time he also took a bride, a young sixteen-year-old girl he had known since childhood named Ruby Cranley.

Ruby became pregnant shortly after and did not relish the prospects of abject poverty for her child. She began to needle Floyd

to do something about bettering their condition.

"What do you want me to do, rob a bank?" Floyd threw at her.

"I don't give a damn what you do," Ruby retorted, "but my baby ain't gonna live in no pig sty. And he ain't gonna be no sharecropper like all the folks around here, who live no better than mongrel dogs scrounging in garbage cans for their grits. You got some gumption in your damn dirty frame, then show it or get out! I'll do better by myself, hear?"

Floyd was silent a long time then drifted slowly toward the door of the ramshackle hut. "I got more gumption in my little finger than all the damn fools in this whole territory got in their bellies. I'll show you!"

"Talk, talk, talk!" Ruby shot back. "I'm tired of your damn talk. And I'm tired of your drinkin' too. We get a dollar and you run into the hills for likker. You ain't nothin' but a bum, hear?"

Floyd stalked out and slammed the door behind him.

It was the spring of 1925. He was gone for six months, and when he returned he had a pocket full of money, expensive clothes, and a powerful car.

Ruby was delighted. She had never seen more than ten dollars in her entire young life so the hundreds Floyd poured in her lap threw her into fits of ecstasy.

Clutching the money in her



FLOYD

hands, she wrapped her arms around her husband and kissed him passionately. "I'll be good to you, Charlie, I'll do anything you want me to do to make you happy. Our baby will have a start to go on with this money, Charlie. I'll put it away. My God, Charlie, there just ain't words to tell you how happy I am. There must be nigh a thousand dollars here."

Floyd was pleased with himself. "There's more where that came from, Ruby baby. A lot more."

"Get it, honey. We'll move away from here and buy a good farm and hire hands and become something." She kissed him again, over and over again.

The sheriff of the county soon

learned that Floyd was a bad boy. The "wanted" circulars on his desk informed him that Charles Arthur Floyd was wanted for engaging in a little \$15,000 payroll robbery in St. Louis. He arrested Floyd and took him away, amid the screams and curses of Ruby, who saw all her dreams of wealth and security break up.

Floyd was convicted of complicity in the robbery and received a sentence of five years in the Missouri State Penitentiary. He was then only twenty years old. It had taken him four years to earn a degree in robbery and the title of ex-convict. But then, when he was graduated from the sixth grade he did so "Stupid Cum Laude."

He was released in 1928, went back to Sallisaw and found that Ruby had no more use for him than she did for a hole in her pants.

"You ain't nothin' but a ignorant ex-convict, Charlie. I got me a good man. He does for me like a man should. I don't need you, so git."

"Is that all you got to say to me?" Floyd asked sarcastically.

"That's all. Just git!"

"To hell with you. I can find better than you in cribs. And you ain't no better than any of them. I'll git and be glad!"

Floyd beat his way to Ohio. There he teamed up with two cronies he had known in prison, Jim Bradley and Jack "Gunner" At-

kins. They taught him the use of the machine gun, which only a few months earlier had found its way into the hands of underworld characters.

The trio set out on bank-robbing forays. They knocked off bank after bank, first in the south then in the north, then in the west, and then in the east. Authorities knew they were up against a professional trio and were frankly baffled as to how to nab them because they had no knowledge of their *modus operandi* or where they would strike next.

A year after the trio had teamed up, in 1929, they drove into Akron, Ohio and passed a red light. H. F. Mennes, the traffic officer on duty, tried to arrest them, Bradley shot him dead. A wild chase followed. Jack Atkins got away, but Floyd was caught, along with Bradley. After a sensational trial both were convicted. Bradley got the chair for the killing. Floyd was sentenced to fifteen years. While he was being transported to prison he leaped out the train window and escaped.

Floyd ran day and night, a mile at a time, a hunted shadow who cringed with hatred in his heart in dark corners, hungry and cold, and fearful of the cell that awaited him. He vowed that he would "hold court in the street"—shoot it out with any cop who tried to arrest him. And then he realized that he had no gun.

A gun. That's what he needed. In a small town in Michigan, just outside the city limits of Detroit, he broke into a sporting goods store, grabbed two guns and a couple of boxes of ammunition, rifled the cash drawer of a little over a hundred dollars and beat his way to Kansas City.

At this time, in 1933, Kansas City belonged to Johnny Lazia, the right-hand of one of the most powerful political figures in the United States, surely the most powerful politician in Missouri.

Singapore, Casablanca, Algiers, Port Said, and Paris had nothing on Kansas City when it came to vice, crime, and murder. The red light district on 14th Street ran openly. The girls walked the streets, posed in the doorways or the windows of the dreary flats and either called to prospective customers or tried to attract their attention by tapping on windows with coins.

Gambling joints ran in the same wide-open fashion, and these were as crooked as the proverbial corkscrews. If a citizen complained to the police that he had been cheated in a gambling joint he was locked up as a drunk and charged with disturbing the peace. No one on the police force wanted to buck the Lazia Syndicate because Lazia made appointments to the police department!

If a criminal was hot he made his way to Kansas City and Johnny

Lazia. All Johnny Lazia had to say was "lay off" and no one bothered the fugitive. You could reach into the FBI files for the name of every wanted man of the time and you could be certain that he had been hidden out while he was hot by Lazia. The term "hidden out" is a misnomer because the fugitive walked the streets as if he owned them.

The Reno Club, the Chesterfield Club, and other similar dives and deadfalls featured gambling, booze, and girls. The waitresses moved from table to table wearing high heels and Chanel No. 5, and nothing else, not even a G-string. The usual high-spending customers included such *illustrious* characters as Bugsy Siegel, Lucky Luciano, Jack McGurn, Charlie "Cherry-Nose" Gioe, Jack Dragna, Verne Miller, a notorious bank robber, and dozens of other top hoods. They wandered in and out of Kansas City like locusts.

Such was Lazia's power as boss of the First Ward that he could offer two of the most wanted men in the country immunity from arrest in one of the largest metropolitan cities in the nation. This weak-eyed goon, a pronounced egomaniac, ex-con and highway robber, a man without morals, scruples or conscience, a dandified dresser who wore spats and a cane, held Kansas City in the palm of his blood-soiled hand as much as Al Capone had held Chicago.

"I'm hotter than the inside of hell," Floyd told Johnny Lazia. "I need help."

"How hot?" Lazia asked.

"I got a fifteen-year rap hanging over my head in Ohio. I lammed from the coppers who were taking me to the pen."

"Well, that ain't too bad. You'll be okay here if you keep your nose clean. Don't do anything in this town; you get it? The big boss don't like heat."

"I won't. I promise you."

"You got any money?"

"About seven dollars."

Lazia drew out a roll of bills, peeled off several. "Here's a couple of hundred. I want you to kick it back, with a little bit of honey when you make a score. If you need more, I'll stake you, on the same terms. There's a guy in town named Bert Miller. You and he should make a nice team. I'll introduce you. Be here tomorrow afternoon at three. In the meantime, you can move around. Here's my card. Go to this address—"

Lazia wrote an address on the back of the card. "Say that I sent you. It's a rooming house. They ask no questions."

Miller was glad to team up with Floyd. The grapevine said Floyd was an expert at taking money from banks.

"We don't have to move right away," Miller said. "I think you had better lie low for a while until most of the heat is off you. Then

we'll move. Meanwhile, I got a nice chick for you, to kind of keep your mind off your troubles. I go with her sister."

Floyd and Beulah Baird hit it off right away. She was a busty babe with no morals and a lust for everything that a buck would buy. A bank robber was right up her alley. Moreover, she was street wise, could drink with Floyd, glass for glass, and had no scruples about "helping out in any way, if you need me, honey."

Floyd patted her on the rump. "It's man's work, baby. *You're* built for other things."

"I can drive as good as any man," Beulah declared.

"That's good to know. It's a little insurance, just in case."

In due time, Floyd and Miller pulled a series of bank jobs. The robberies went on for several months and the quartet lived high. And then, in Bowling Green, Ohio, the jinx State for Floyd, the law trapped them. Caught in a road-block, Bert Miller was killed in the vicious gun battle that ensued. Rose Baird surrendered, leaping out of the riddled car and screaming wildly for mercy. Beulah was seriously wounded. Floyd saved himself. He jumped from the car when it roared to a stop, and with the deadly machine gun in his hands shot his way to freedom.

He might have taken Beulah along with him, but he left her for the cops, the unforgiveable sin in

the underworld. Beulah cursed after him as he ran.

"You filthy rat! You lousy, double-crossing bastard! I'll get you! I'll get you!"

Shortly after, police received a tip that Floyd was drinking it up in a bootleg joint in Kansas City. The cops raided the joint, and in the shooting affray Floyd killed a police officer and a civilian. With every police authority in the country on the alert for him, and searching the known hangouts he frequented, the cunning killer made his way to Sallisaw and the Cookson Hills.

Once there Floyd spread money around to the poverty-stricken share-croppers and thus bought the protection of silence. Police could learn nothing in their questioning of the Sallisaw residents. Charles Arthur Floyd? Pretty Boy Floyd? Nope. Ain't never heard tell of the feller.

Floyd then met Adam Richetti, and the two set out on a series of bank jobs. They robbed bank after bank in the small towns of Oklahoma, and then Floyd foolishly decided to visit Ruby and to effect a temporary reconciliation. Ruby was emphatically against the idea and when Floyd was dozing she notified Sheriff Erv Kelley of McIntosh County.

Sheriff Kelley made the mistake of trying to talk Floyd into a surrender, a silly and futile error.

"Charlie," Sheriff Kelley called out, "I want you to come out and



give yourself up. I'll see you get a fair trial. Come out with your hands up."

Floyd came out. But not with his hands up. Instead, he had the ever-present machine gun in his hands, and when he emerged from the house he aimed the gun at Sheriff Kelley and cut him in two.

This was the evil, vicious, human devil the attractive young prostitute had feared, and rightly so, and in her nervous fright to placate him in every way she could, named "Pretty-Boy". The name stuck because Adam Richetti spread the story around.

When Frank "Jelly" Nash walked away from the federal prison in Leavenworth he was met a short distance away by two Chicago hoods who picked him up and drove him straight to the Windy City, to the O. P. Inn, operated by "Doc" Stacey.

Stacey, a cutie, financed bank jobs, jewel heists, and other sundry capers for hoods, gunmen, and killers for a ten per cent split of the take. He was delighted to see Nash.

"How're you, Boy?" he greeted Nash. "Wonderful to see you." He patted him on the back enthusias-

tically. "Had the boys right there to pick you up, didn't I?" He laughed with glee. "You should have done this long ago. All you'd had to do was get in touch with me."

"I know, I know," Nash replied, "but the time wasn't ripe. I had to wait for the right time."

"Sure, sure, I know. Come on, let's go into my office and talk it over. I got some real good boys waiting in there who want to meet you."

"Anybody I know? I'm a little touchy about meeting people I don't know, especially right now. You understand?"

Stacey took him by the arm. "I wouldn't steer you wrong for the world, Frank. Come on. These are good boys. The best."

"Let's wait a minute, Doc. I want to know a little about these guys. I'm hotter than a piece of burning dynamite, with a big reward over my head. Tell me a little about these guys."

Stacey gave him a run-down. All four men waiting in his office were top-notch professional heist-men and gunmen, and all were just as hot as he was. They were guys who were connected all over the country.

"I'm telling you, Frank, you're moving in with the best there is. They feel the same way about you as you do about them, right now. They've got a lot of heat on them too. They aren't anxious to let just any guy come in."

"But who are they? Can't you tell me?"

Stacey smiled. "Come on. Come in and meet them and see for yourself. Isn't that the best way?"

Stacey hooked his arm in Nash's and urged him toward the back, where the office was situated.

Nash held back a moment and Stacey saw why. Nash was staring at the attractive and svelte blonde behind the bar.

"You like her?" Stacey asked.

"Yeah. Very much. She's a looker."

Stacey smiled. "I'll introduce you. She's on the loose, so you can get home free. I'll tell you one thing though, Frank. She's not a bum, so take your time with her."

"Let's go."

"No, Frank. Business first. She'll wait."

In Stacey's office were four men —Alvin "Creepy" Karpis, Harvey Bailey, Freddie Barker, son of the notorious Ma Barker, and Earl Christman.

"Boys," Stacey said, "here he is, the one and only Frank "Jelly" Nash, late of Uncle Sam's College. He left without taking his diploma."

"I've heard of you," Karpis said to Nash. "You still got your guts with you?"

Nash grinned. "I've heard of you too. The grapevine said you guys got the bank in Fort Scott. I understand you got a chunk but left a bigger chunk." He looked

down at his shoes, and then at each of the four men. "I don't leave anything but empty drawers. As for my guts, try me."

Freddy Barker said, "He's okay with me. Bald head and all."

"Okay with me too," Christman said. "Come on. Let's talk turkey."

Bailey nodded agreement.

"We've got the Cloud County Bank in Concordia, Kansas cased," Karpis said. "We're counting you in on it. On Stacey's okay. The rest is up to you." Karpis' eyes narrowed. "I hope you're as good as he says you are."

"Take my word for it, Al," Stacey said. "I've never given you a bum steer yet, have I?"

"Okay," Karpis said, "you keep in touch with Stacey. When we're ready to move he'll tell you where to meet us."

The men shook hands all around. And so the gang was formed, five of the most lethal gunmen and bank robbers in the history of American crime. Not even Dillinger's gang could have matched it in efficiency and violence.

Doc Stacey staked Nash to a thousand dollars while the wait began, and Stacey introduced him to Frances Luce, the girl he wanted to meet. He wined and dined her, spent extravagantly, and then proposed. She accepted him without hesitation.

"I've got a little business to take care of first," he told her, and then

we'll get married." Nash forgot to tell Frances he had a wife somewhere, still legally married to him. That little matter didn't bother Nash at all. Besides, he didn't use his right name anyway.

In due time the gang pulled off the Concordia robbery and made away with a little over \$250,000. Nash returned to Chicago, picked up Frances and the two went to Joplin, Missouri, to the home of Herbert Farmer, who had done time with Nash in Oklahoma.

Farmer greeted his old prison buddy with open arms.

"I heard you pulled off a neat trick in Concordia," Farmer said.

Nash grinned. "It was pretty neat. The guys I'm working with know their stuff. Creepy Karpis, Harvey Bailey, a guy named Earl Christman, and Freddie Barker, Doc Barker's kid brother. You know some of them?"

Farmer nodded. "All of them. Karpis and Freddie did time together in the Kansas State Pen. That's where they met. That Karpis is a rough boy. Francis Albin Karpavicz. A real tough hunk. Don't cross him, Frankie. He'll kill in a minute. That Freddie Barker is okay but a little on the dumb side. Christman used to be a conman. Harvey Bailey is sharp, rough and tough too. You really tied in with a hot bunch. You remember Doc Barker, don't you?"

"Sure. He and Volney Davis still in the Oklahoma State Pen?"

"Yeah, but Ma Barker is trying to spring him."

"But he's doing a life bit."

"Heavy dough would spring Judas in Oklahoma. I don't think you'll last too long with this mob. When Doc and Volney Davis get out Doc will take over. That means you'll be out." Here Farmer paused and looked meaningfully at Nash. "You will know a lot about the mob by then. Maybe too much. Get it?"

Frances turned pale. "You mean they would kill Frankie?"

Nash patted her arm. "Don't worry, honey. I can take care of myself. I'll do a couple more jobs with the boys and get out before Doc and Volney Davis hit the bricks from the pen. I should have enough green then to keep us going for a long time."

In the next month the gang pulled two more bank heists, each robbery netting them six figure amounts.

Nash, a guy who loved a good time and the best of everything, went wild. The toupee he wore gave him all the disguise he needed and he looked very little like the man on the *WANTED* posters that hung in every post office and police station in the country.

Confident of his disguise, he moved about the country freely, checked into the best hotels, ate in the finest restaurants, bought the most expensive clothes money could buy for himself and Frances.

A smart cookie, he was aware of the fact that in a pinch he would need friends, so he dropped off money to Herbie Farmer and paid his debts to Doc Stacey.

And then Doc Barker and Volney Davis got out of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary. Doc Barker sent for Frank Nash through Doc Stacey.

Barker got his nickname of "Doc" through his work as an orderly in the prison hospital. All he did to earn the cognomen was to remove bed pans from patients. Medically, he couldn't tell the difference between an aspirin and a cough drop. He was just a little short of illiterate and thought a verb was something you put into soup to flavor it. But what he lacked in formal education he made up for in innate cunning. In cruelty and viciousness he matched Pretty Boy Floyd, and both were deaf to all entreaties for mercy, however impassioned.

Doc Stacey earned his nickname by virtue of the fact that he greeted everyone with "Whatta yah say, Doc?"

Stacey was sure he knew why Doc Barker wanted to see Nash and tried to convince Barker that Nash was okay.

Barker snarled back, "I didn't say he wasn't okay. I said I wanted to see him. All you gotta do is get in' touch with him and set up a meet. You got that?"

"Sure, sure, Doc. Anything you

say. I'll get in touch with him as soon as I can."

While Stacey waited for Nash to call him, Harvey Bailey was picked up by G-Men for the Fort Scott bank job. Employees in the Fort Scott bank identified the pictures of Bailey as one of the men who had stuck up the jug. News of the pinch hit the papers.

That was when Nash called Stacey in Chicago.

"Am I hot?" Nash asked.

"Not for the Fort Scott job, but you are for the others. That's the way I hear it. I'm going to give it to you straight, Frank. Doc Barker wants to see you. If I were you, I would pass up that meet. He's a crazy bastard and he's got Volney Davis with him. The way I look at it, they don't want you in any more and because they know of the jobs you were in on they want to put you out of the way. I'd lay low if I were you."

"You got any ideas about where I can go?"

"Yeah. Go to Hot Springs. To the White Front Pool Hall. It's run by Dick Galatas. Tell him I sent you. He's got the town in his hip pocket and you'll be safe there."

"Okay, Doc. Thanks a lot. I'll keep in touch. And if anything breaks, you get in touch with me, eh?"

"Sure thing, Frankie."

Richard Tallman Galatas, as Stacey said, had Hot Springs, Arkansas, in his hip pocket. His pro-

tection in Hot Springs was Dutch Akers, Chief of Detectives, to whom he paid off and with whom he ran an assortment of rackets, from bookmaking to extortion.

Nash didn't go straight to Hot Springs. Instead, he went to Hollywood, where he checked into a plush hotel and made it known that he was a big-money man from the East interested in investing heavily in a motion picture production. The sharpies who operated along Poverty Row, where the "quickies" were turned out like sausages in a machine beat a path to his suite. They brought along some has-beens who had been big names at one time, and Frances was ecstatic by the way they fawned over her.

While Nash and Frances cut a wide swath in Hollywood, Doc Barker and the mob were busy trying to spring Bailey. They engaged Earl Smith, an experienced trial lawyer, to defend him. Smith was certain he could win an acquittal for Bailey, and the gang plunked down an enormous fee for his services.

Smith blew the case—a case he didn't have a chance to win—and he signed his death warrant in doing it. The gang lured Smith to a secluded side-road about fifteen miles north of Tulsa and shot him dead.

While they were in Tulsa, Doc Barker ran into Pretty Boy Floyd and Adam Richetti, who were hid-

ing out in Claremore, a small town of about six thousand population.

"I'm looking for a guy named Frank 'Jelly' Nash," Doc told Floyd and Richetti. "You hear anything about him?"

"I've heard about him," Floyd said, "but I ain't seen him. Why're you looking for him?"

"He knows too much."

"I hear he's solid. When did he change?"

"When I hit the bricks. Soon as Davis and I got out the G-Men suddenly get a lot of information. I figure he tipped them about Bailey."

"Whatta yah want me to do?"

"What I'd do for you if you asked me the same thing."

Floyd shrugged. "It ain't nothin'. If Adam and I see him we'll do you that little favor."

"Thanks. If you want to get in touch with me for anything, you can call a guy named Doc Stacey at the O. P. Inn in Chi. He's solid and will know where we are. Just in case."

"Doc Stacey. O. P. Inn. Chi. I got it," Floyd said.

The demented urge to knock off Nash, an urge founded solely on suspicion, characterized Doc Barker. His accidental meeting with Pretty Boy Floyd set the stage for what was to follow in a chain of the most unbelievable coincidences.

Nash finally tired of his masquerade in Hollywood and headed for Hot Springs with Frances. Ar-

riving in town, he went straight to the White Front Pool Hall and sought out Dick Galatas.

"I'm Frank Nash," he told Galatas. "Doc Stacey sent me."

"I know," Galatas replied. "Stacey called me. Where've you been? I've been expecting you."

Nash grinned. "I thought I was a little hot there for a while so I stayed away. I think the heat's off me a little."

Galatas grunted. "Not much. You're hotter than hell. You'll be okay here, but don't pull anything in town. And don't make yourself too conspicuous. As long as you follow orders you'll have nothing to worry about. My friend is the chief of detectives. He'll keep me posted about you, in time for you to move fast if you have to. Okay?"

"Whatever you say."

"Good. Have you checked in any place yet?"

"Not yet."

"Well, you go to a summer home run by a friend of mine. It's on the outskirts of town. Very fancy place. You'll be safe there, and no questions asked. Just say I sent you." Galatas scribbled an address on a piece of paper and handed it to Nash. "Wait here. I'll get one of my boys to take you there in my car."

For several months Nash and Frances were happy. They moved about freely, visited all the restaurants and hot spots, walked through the town like any legiti-

mate citizens. There was no need for Nash to pull any heist because he still had a lot of money left as his share of the loot taken in the banks he had helped rob. He was sure he would be safe from now on.

Then the roof fell in.

The FBI, relentless as the most determined of avengers, followed Nash's trail across the country and finally got a tip that he was in Hot Springs.

On June 16, 1933, two FBI Agents, F. J. Lackey and Frank Smith, strode into the White Front Pool Hall, spotted Nash and confronted him.

"You're under arrest, Nash," Lackey said sharply.

"Who the hell are you?" Nash challenged.

"We're Special Agents of the FBI," Lackey answered, and showed Nash his credentials. "Let's go, Nash. The ball game is over."

"I'm not going anywhere," Nash retorted. "Those credentials look phony as hell to me. And so do you guys."

Lackey reached out to take hold of Nash's lapels but Nash slugged him. Lackey slugged back, several vicious punches to Nash's belly, and then Smith hit him with a couple of solid shots to the jaw. While Nash was dazed the two FBI agents slipped the cuffs on his wrists and hustled him out the door, shoved him into the back seat of their car and sped away.

Dick Galatas went into action as



ADAM RICHETTI

soon as the trio were out the door. He called Frances and told her what had happened. She hurried over to Galatas' house and there the two went into swift conference. Dick Galatas decided to call Dutch Akers.

Dutch Akers was a wise cop, which is to say that he was a good cop when he had to be. He knew whose money to take and how much. He was willing to give the proper service for payment received, and he didn't double-cross anyone. That made him a wise cop, until the blow fell, and then he was a lousy cop and a dimwit.

Akers listened to Galatas and said he would see what he could

do. He looked at Frances. "This is going to cost you a little, Mrs. Nash. I'll have to pay off down the line."

"How much?" Frances asked.

"I'd say about five thousand. I think that's cheap enough, don't you?"

Galatas stood by silently, allowing Akers to practice his shake-down on Frances Nash. No matter what happened to Nash, his bread and butter was here in Hot Springs, and how he earned it depended on Akers. Even if Galatas disapproved, he still had to allow the shake.

"I'll pay it," Frances answered. "I'll get the money to you right away. Only get Frank back. As quickly as possible."

"I'll do my best," Akers promised.

"We've got to stop those agents before they reach Leavenworth, Dutch," Dick Galatas said. "Once they get Nash behind bars it will be too late."

"I'll do everything I can," Akers said. "Now, Dick, you do what you can."

Meanwhile, Smith and Lackey had picked up Chief of Police Otto Reed of McAlester, Oklahoma as a reinforcement and the three, together with Nash, reached Benton, Arkansas. Their car was stopped by Benton police officers who approached them with guns drawn.

"We've received word a man has been kidnaped in Hot Springs,"

one of the police officers said. "What about it? Who are you guys?"

Lackey told him. "We're taking this man back to Leavenworth. He's an escaped prisoner, among other things. He's also wanted for bank robbery."

The police officers were satisfied and permitted the car to proceed. They were stopped again in Little Rock. At Fort Smith, Lackey, Smith and Reed held a conference. It was decided to telephone the FBI office in Kansas City and explain what had happened. They were advised to put their prisoner aboard the Missouri Pacific train at Fort Smith for Kansas City.

"We'll have some men waiting to assist you when you arrive," the K.C. officer said.

Galatas all this time had been busier than a one-legged cat chasing a speedy mouse. He called Chicago, Joplin, Missouri, and Kansas City.

The people he contacted got busy, and the underworld wires burned as plans to rescue Nash from his captors were made.

The frenzied attempts to free Nash were all out of true proportion to his importance. He was just a lucky bank robber. However, he had become a link in a chain which now stretched from Hot Springs to Kansas City to Chicago, and the men who had agreed to help were important and could get things done, and that was the ex-

tent of Nash's influence, forged by the fact of Galatas' intervention.

The hoods who had agreed to help had close contacts with people in high places, in politics, in police departments, in an underworld circle which encompassed the sphere of influence of conniving men who took crooked dollars and were willing to close their eyes to any underworld schemes.

At this moment, a coincidence occurred that forged the chain of circumstances which led to the bloody and shocking event scheduled to take place, an event that brought about the downfall of some of the most powerful men in the nation. It all centered around the attempt to rescue a convicted felon, a thief, robber, and murderer from his legitimate and lawful captors.

About the same time that Nash was picked up by Agents Smith and Lackey, Sheriff Jack Killingsworth of Bolivar, Missouri, was in a public garage when he encountered Pretty Boy Floyd and Adam Richetti, although he didn't know who they were at the time. They looked suspicious to Killingsworth and he started to question them.

Adam Richetti, standing behind Floyd, kept his eyes locked on Killingsworth while he was questioning Floyd, who answered in terse, snarling tones.

"Let me see your driver's license," Killingsworth demanded.

"Go to hell, Copper," Floyd re-

torted. "You want to see my driver's license, try to take it from me!"

Killingsworth went for his gun but Richetti beat him to the draw, overpowered him, marched him out of the garage, put him in his car and made him drive them out of town. The car broke down and Floyd held up a salesman and forced him to drive the party to Kansas City. There Floyd and Richetti released the sheriff and the salesman on a lonely side road. They never knew until later how lucky they had been to leave alive.

Pretty Boy Floyd and Adam Richetti reported to Johnny Lazia.

"You guys are real hot," Lazia told them. "I got the word a while back, and a couple of hours ago about your caper this morning. I'll help you. But remember one thing; don't do anything in this town unless you talk to me about it first. Understood? Floyd, you can go to the same place, but don't fly too high for a while."

It was Johnny Lazia, criminal Boss of the first ward in Kansas City, whom Fate selected to set up the terror-ridden murders that were to take place the next day.

Lazia got urgent calls from Stacey in Chicago, Galatas in Hot Springs, and Herbie Farmer in Joplin. Then he knew what to do; he sent for Pretty Boy Floyd and Adam Richetti.

"The feds are bringing in a guy named Frank Nash from Hot Springs to return him to Leaven-

worth. Some friends of mine want him sprung. Can you handle it?"

Pretty Boy Floyd raised astonished eyebrows. "Nash? Jelly Nash?"

"Yeah. You know him?"

"Only by his rep. I know he heisted some jugs with Freddie Barker, Creepy Karpis, Earl Christman, and Harvey Bailey."

"That's him. Look, this may be a little tough, so I'm going to send along a pal of mine, Verne Miller, to give you guys a hand. How're you fixed for heavy arms?"

"I've got a Tommy, some sawed-offs, and pistols."

"Good. That's all you'll need. I don't think you'll have any trouble if you get the drop on the feds because they don't carry any heat. The train pulls in at seven in the morning. You better be there a little earlier. Come right here after the caper. I want Nash brought to me."

When Floyd and Richetti left Lazia, Floyd said, "This is real rich, handing this guy over to us on a silver platter. I guess this will make Doc Barker real happy."

"But what about Lazia? He might not like it. He wants Nash."

"Ah, the hell with him. We can say it was an accident, that Nash got in the way when we started blasting."

"We going that route?" Richetti asked.

"Why not? They're coppers."

At seven o'clock in the morning,

on that June 17, 1933, the Missouri Pacific train pulled into the Union Station in Kansas City.

It was a warm, clear day, tinted with sunshine and rimmed with a bright morning gold. The spacious plaza outside the station was a scene of lazy activity as crowds moved toward the entrances. There were smiles on the faces of the men and women, and some of them laughed lightly as they spoke to each other. Many of these were vacationers, looking ahead to a week or two of relaxation and fun. None of them envisioned the guttural rise of violence that was to sweep across the plaza in the next few minutes; none of them believed a scene of such maddening slaughter could be possible outside a field of battle.

Yet it was to come, swiftly, without any warning, and it froze them speechless for timeless seconds.

The Missouri Pacific, carrying Frank "Jelly" Nash, Chief of Police Otto Reed, and Special Agents F. J. Lackey and Frank Smith, was met by Special Agent Raymond Caffrey and two Kansas City detectives, W. J. Grooms and Frank Hermanson. In a car outside the station, two more special agents of the FBI waited. These were the reinforcements promised Lackey and Smith. The group moved through the crowded station toward the east exit where Caffrey had parked his car.

In front of Caffrey's car the special agent said, "All right, Nash. Get into the front seat."

The manacled Nash looked around the street, a vague hope in his eyes. Caffrey pushed him and again ordered him to get into the car. Nash got into the front seat, and then Chief Reed and two FBI agents climbed into the rear seat. Grooms and Hermanson, and another agent were standing beside the car while Caffrey walked around the automobile and put his hand on the handle of the door on the driver's side. He opened the door and prepared to slide under the wheel.

Then it happened.

The light, shape, and tone of the morning was suddenly shattered, ripped apart by the dissonant roar of savage violence.

Three men, two of them armed with Thompson submachine guns, the other with heavy caliber pistols, approached the car, and one of them shouted, "Up! Up! Get 'em up!"

The crowds in the plaza hurrying toward the entrances to the Union Station, and those coming out of it, had not yet become aware of what was happening.

Nash turned his head and looked at the men with the machine guns. For a fleeting instant a look of hope flashed in his eyes, and at the same time Detective W. J. Grooms, courageous but foolish, swung his gun up and around and fired. The



slug hit one of the men holding a machine gun, but only in the shoulder, and he cursed.

"Let 'em have it!" the wounded gunman yelled. "Let the bastards have it! Kill! Kill!"

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" Nash yelled back.

His warning words mattered little to the three men. The slow, grey ash of time and death, the payment in the coin of the realm, came to him with panic-driven swiftness. Slug after slug hit him and he slumped over the steering wheel.

The machine guns moved to and fro, and the man with pistols fired, too, and the crowds in the plaza stopped and turned their heads and looked, horror in their eyes and on their faces. They saw Detectives Hermanson and Grooms fall, and Special Agent Raymond J. Caffrey, and they saw the blood spurt from their bodies.

A woman screamed. Another

fainted and a man caught her. There were more shots, then a brief pause. A moment of silence, and one of the gunmen spoke, calmly, as if he were inspecting a coat he intended to buy, and his words were harsh and sullen and cast a sickness over the area where he stood.

"They're all dead here," the gunman said. "Let's go."

The three killers hurried to their car, got in and sped away. It was all over in less than a minute. Sixty seconds of blazing death for five men—Chief of Police Otto Reed, Officers Grooms and Hermanson, Agent Raymond J. Caffrey, and Frank "Jelly" Nash.

The news of the killings in the plaza of the Union Station was headlined in newspapers all over the country, and a nation read and wondered how such a thing could happen, in a public square, in broad daylight.

Boss Tom Pendergast called in Johnny Lazia and demanded to know who was behind the massacre.

"I want the names of every one of those damned killers, and I want them before the sun sets today. Understand? Today, not tomorrow. I know damned well that you know them. I'm going to give you enough time to get your bloody house in order, and then I want those names."

Lazia tried to bluff his way through. "I don't know them, Boss."

They must have been guys who sneaked in here."

"You're a damned liar, Lazia. You know who they were. You know it and I know it. So bring those names to me today. I told you over and over again that I wanted no violence in this town. I told you that violence brings heat I can't stand. This thing is liable to ruin me. You understand?" He punched at the air and then pounded his desk. "*Ruin me*, you dumb bastard!"

They were prophetic words.

Special agents swarmed into Kansas City, and with the aid of the local police, who now had their hands free, began digging into the facts of the massacre. Day after day the agents and special detectives from the Homicide Division kept digging with fierce intensity. Names began to come into the office of the FBI, searched out, dug out, hammered out.

Herbie Farmer of Joplin. Doc Stacey of Chicago. Verne Miller, gunman, bank robber, and professional killer, a man who looked effeminate. But his looks belied the granite-like hardness inside of him. Agents checked out each name, gathered information on them, tied them in with one man after another until they were tied to each other and the picture began to take a little form.

Boss Pendergast meanwhile rode Johnny Lazia's tail. Lazia continued to deny knowledge of

the men involved in the murders, and for a good reason. He feared that if he spilled his guts it would make him an accessory, or worse yet, a principal in the murders and so put him in the gas chamber.

"Lazia," Pendegast said, "you're a stupid, idiotic fool. You know I could get you immunity if you talked. But you won't. Okay, have it your way. But get this—I'm washing my hands of you. You brought me heat I told you repeatedly I couldn't and didn't want. You double-crossed me. Now you stand alone. Get out. Get the hell out of my sight."

Lazia tried desperately to placate Pendegast but all his pleas fell on deaf ears. Pendegast was adamant. Politician that he was, he knew he no longer could stand behind Lazia, that sooner or later the finger would point at the man and then it would be all over. He had no alternative, and as a matter of expedience and self-defense, to dismiss Lazia from his favor.

Word of Johnny Lazia's fall from grace leaked almost immediately.

The FBI learned then that Herbie Farmer was an old buddy of Frank Nash, had once served a stretch with him. They learned, too, that Farmer knew Verne Miller, and that Miller had done business with Doc Stacey, and that Stacey was connected in Kansas City and Hot Springs, as well as other cities across the nation, with

top hoods. Johnny Lazia's name bounced into the picture, not a clear-cut picture yet but very evident in outline.

Word came then that the massacre had been committed by out-of-town hoods, professional killers. No names. Just the term *out-of-town talent*.

The FBI refused to accept the statements. Somebody in Kansas City was connected with the killings. An agent had been killed in cold blood. They wouldn't be satisfied until they saw the killers dead, one way or another.

For a solid year the FBI agents assigned to solve the Union Station massacre were all over Kansas City, masquerading as hoods, junkies, bank robbers, ex-cons, under every guise imaginable. But it availed them nothing. They had run into a brick wall of silence.

It became more and more obvious to the FBI that somebody important in the underworld had been involved in the crime or the stool-pigeons and informers would not have clammed up so tightly. But who? Who was it that the underworld feared so much that not a single scrap of information could be forthcoming?

The bureau was desperate. Despite all its efforts, its threats and promises, nobody would talk. The trail got colder and colder, and it seemed that the case never would be solved. At this point, a determined and tenacious lawyer named

Maurice Milligan was appointed United States District Attorney.

One of the first things Milligan, to whom the law was a sacred thing, did after taking office was to ask that he be briefed on the progress of the investigation into the Union Station massacre. He made an exhaustive study of each facet of the crime, went over each clue with minute care. He was stymied.

There were some pertinent questions in his mind, however. Who had ordered Agents Lackey and Smith stopped when they were transporting Nash from Hot Springs? Who was it that had telephoned police authorities in Benton and Little Rock to say that a man had been kidnaped?

The key to the whole puzzle seemed to lie in the answers to those questions. He sent FBI agents into Hot Springs to check with the telephone company.

Records of the telephone company in Hot Springs revealed that on June 16, 1933, calls had been made from that city to Little Rock, Arkansas; Joplin, Missouri; and to Chicago. It was further revealed by agents working in Chicago and Kansas City that Doc Stacey had made a call to Kansas City from his O. P. Inn, and that Verne Miller had made a call from Kansas City to the O. P. Inn. Things were getting hot.

Milligan wanted to talk to Dick Galatas but Galatas and his wife had left Hot Springs. Herbie Farm-

er had left Joplin. Frances Nash had disappeared. Verne Miller had taken his mistress, Vivian Mathias, and gone to parts unknown. Why would all these men and women suddenly take it on the lam unless they were involved, unless they wanted to avoid questioning? Maurice Milligan was certain now that he was on the right track.

Agents now learned that immediately after the massacre, Verne Miller had moved all his household goods to the home of Fritz Mulloy, an underworld character. And no one knew where Mulloy had gone or why he was mixed up in the entire affair. In the basement of Verne Miller's abandoned bungalow agents found several empty beer bottles. They picked these up, on the bare chance they might contain fingerprints which would reveal other names, perhaps the names of the killers.

Maurice Milligan learned then of Sheriff Jack Killingsworth's encounter with Pretty Boy Floyd and Adam Richetti. Then he came across Mrs. Lottie West, the woman in charge of the Traveler's Aid desk at the entrance to the Union Station.

Mrs. West prided herself on her memory and ability to read faces. The morning of the massacre she had noticed a man sitting on a bench a few feet away from her desk. He kept watching the gates where passengers came from arriving trains.

"I told myself," she said to Milligan, "that this man had a particularly cruel face. However, I didn't wish to condemn him solely on my own judgment."

"Okay, Mrs. West. What else did you notice or see?"

"Well, I tried a couple of times to engage this man in conversation but he wouldn't answer any of my questions. I thought he might need help of some kind, information as to where he wanted to stay or something, but he just wouldn't say a word to me. He wouldn't even admit it was a nice day."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. West. What else? Did you see anything more of this man?"

"Yes, I did. The next time I saw him he and two other men were near the automobile of that poor man who was killed. Oh, it was awful, simply awful. I saw the whole thing, you know."

"What did you see? Tell me everything you saw. Don't omit a thing."

"Well, when I saw those poor men shot I started to scream, and then I ran to look for a policeman and I found Officer Fanning and shouted to him to shoot those men who had killed all those people. He did shoot at them but missed them. I'm really ashamed of my feelings, you know—to have wanted someone killed—but I just couldn't let those men get away. Those awful murderers!"

"Yes, I know, Mrs. West. I'm



going to show you some mugs, some photographs. See if you can pick out the men you saw on that morning."

Milligan took a folder of mug shots from his desk and told Mrs. West to go through them. She turned page after page until she came to a picture of Pretty Boy Floyd.

"*That's him!*" she cried. "That's the man I saw on that morning!"

Milligan wasn't excited. He showed her a photo of Adam Ricchetti but she couldn't identify him as one of the men she had seen near the car. He and the agents in the room were a little skeptical.

They already had experienced a score or more of "positive" identifications made by men and women who claimed they were eye witnesses to the killings. They had picked out photographs of Wilbur Underhill and Robert Brady, and these were the men charged with the crime in the first indictment returned. The charges were dis-

missed, however, when investigation revealed that neither of the two men could have been mixed up in the murders.

Milligan thanked Mrs. West for her information. "You have been very helpful. If we need you again we'll get in touch with you."

"Yes, sir. I'll be glad to help all I can. I certainly hope you get those men."

"Yes, Mrs. West. So do we." And Milligan muttered a silent and solemn "Amen."

IN THE WEEKS that followed, Herbie Farmer and his wife were located and arrested. Mrs. Frances Nash was found in the home of her parents in Winona, Illinois. The FBI then learned that Verne Miller and Vivian Mathias were in Chicago. A trap was set but Miller escaped after a hectic running gun battle. Vivian, however, was arrested in the apartment she and Miller occupied. Fritz Mulloy and Doc Stacey were arrested. Things were starting to shape up.

Vivian Mathias refused to talk and she was charged with harboring a criminal and a fugitive from justice. She was convicted and sentenced to a year and a day in prison. Her conviction developed nothing. She took her punishment with a shrug of her shoulders and a stoical attitude.

Frances Nash, however, broke under interrogation and told what she knew about the telephone calls

that had been made and who had made them.

"Do you know a man named Charles 'Pretty Boy' Floyd?" she was asked.

"No, sir, I don't."

"Or a man named Adam Richetti?"

"No, sir."

She was shown pictures of Floyd and Richetti. "Ever see those men before? In the company of your husband?"

"No, sir."

"Ever hear their names? Think hard, Mrs. Nash. This is very important."

She was silent for a time, evidently trying to recall to her mind the names. She finally said, "No, sir. I never heard their names before."

District Attorney Milligan and the agents in the room shook their heads in frustration. It was always the same thing. No one had ever heard of either Floyd or Richetti. Yet there was the sure feeling that they were mixed up in the massacre, neck deep.

Through the underworld grapevine there were tiny slivers of light in the information which the FBI received. Although their investigations told them that Floyd and Richetti never had been known to be connected in any way with Nash, Galatas, Miller, or Stacey, there was still the fact that they had been in Kansas City on the day of the killings. That much they es-

tablished. If anyone knew, and if anyone would talk, it would be Richard Galatas. He had everything to lose by refusing to talk.

At this time another discouraging incident occurred to frustrate Milligan and the agents on the case. Detroit police found a nude body wrapped in a blanket under a railroad embankment. The dead man had been viciously beaten and shot. He was Verne Miller.

That left the FBI with a loose end dangling high in the air and a puzzling question to add to those they already had. Who had murdered Miller, and why? The answer was that he was too hot, wouldn't leave the Motor City, and the Detroit hoods didn't want him around. Finis!

"Floyd and Richetti!" Milligan exclaimed. "And Galatas. We have to find them, one or two or all of them. The key lies there. I'm sure of it."

Weeks went by. Then out of a clear sky came the break in the case. A magazine devoted to stories of crime and criminals printed in each issue a list of names and a column of photos of fugitives from justice. Galatas' photo and description appeared in one of the issues. A reader of the magazine recognized Galatas in New Orleans, followed him into a building, and then reported his find to the FBI. Dick Galatas and his wife were arrested. Then came another break in the case.

Fingerprints on one of the beer bottles found in Verne Miller's bungalow proved to be those of Adam Richetti. There was now an established link between Verne Miller and Adam Richetti, and it was logical to assume that if Richetti was linked to Miller then certainly Pretty Boy Floyd had to be also.

Questioning of Dick Galatas confirmed the tie-in of Miller, Floyd and Richetti.

"You made a call to Chicago, didn't you?" Galatas was asked.

"Yes, sir."

"To a man known as Doc Stacey?"

"Yes, sir."

"You asked him to aid in the freeing of Nash?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he say he would do?"

"He said he would call Johnny Lazia in Kansas City because we learned the train would stop in Kansas City."

"Do you know that he did make the call?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who made the calls to Benton and Little Rock?"

"Dutch Akers."

"The chief of detectives in Hot Springs?"

"Yes, sir."

"You also made a call to Joplin, Missouri, didn't you, to Herbert Farmer?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you say to him?"

"I asked him to help free Nash, if he could."

"What did he tell you?" the agents demanded.

"He said he would do all he could."

"What did he do?"

"I don't know. I never learned that."

"All right. Now, you knew Verne Miller, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You knew he was in Kansas City on June sixteenth, the day before the shootings?"

"Yes, sir."

"You knew that Verne Miller was connected in Kansas City, that he was, or had been, associated with Johnny Lazia?"

"Yes, sir, I knew that."

Dick Galatas was now asked the big question. "Did you know that Pretty Boy Floyd and Adam Richetti were in Kansas City the day before the shootings?"

"I learned that later."

"How?"

"Doc Stacey told me."

"You also learned later that Pretty Boy Floyd, Adam Richetti, and Verne Miller had combined in the effort to rescue Nash, didn't you?"

Everyone waited breathlessly for Galatas' reply because this was a shot in the dark, the big shot that would definitely link Floyd and Richetti to the crime.

Galatas looked from one face to the other, hesitated, drew in a long,

slow breath, and said, "Yes, sir, I learned that."

Milligan and the agents in the room sighed and relaxed at long last. It was all over. They finally had it, the information that would put Floyd and Richetti in the gas chamber, and maybe Johnny Lazia too. All that remained was to find Floyd and Richetti.

Lazia at least would be easy. Not so Doc Stacey and Herbie Farmer.

Before the FBI could get to Johnny Lazia the underworld in Kansas City saved them the trouble. On a hot August night in 1934, a little over a year after the massacre, three men crouched in ambush in front of an exclusive apartment house and when Lazia emerged they riddled his body with about twenty-five machine gun slugs. He had double-crossed the Big Boss on the Big Caper, a caper too hot to square, and paid the price for it in gangland fashion.

WANTED bulletins for Floyd and Richetti for the killings were published and hung in every post office and police station in the country, and agents began to scour the underworld for them.

Shortly after, police officers in a small town in Ohio were making a routine inspection of a city park when they saw two men sleeping on the grass in a secluded spot. They awakened them and asked who they were.

Floyd said, "We're just passing

through. We're on our way to Pittsburgh to work in the mills."

Richetti backed away from the cops for several steps, while the two officers whispered together. One of the officers said, "We'll have to take you in for further questioning."

"Like hell!" Richetti pulled his gun and started shooting.

The two cops pulled their guns and shot back. While the shooting was going on, Floyd turned and ran leaving Richetti to fight it out alone. Richetti was overpowered and thrown into jail. He refused to give his name or answer any other questions. His fingerprints were taken and they revealed him to be Adam Richetti. The FBI was notified immediately and shot into action! For if this was Richetti, then the man who got away was Floyd!

The FBI, led by Melvin H. Purvis, who less than a year later was to kill John Dillinger in Chicago, hurried to the place where Floyd was last seen, just outside the town of Liverpool, Ohio.

The FBI combed the area, yard by yard, inch by inch, hour after hour. There were two dozen agents in the party, most of them armed with machine guns.

Two days later, on October 22, 1934, Floyd staggered into a farmhouse about ten miles east of Liverpool. He asked the farm wife, Mrs. Ellen Conkle, for food.

"I haven't eaten in two days. Can you give me something? I'll

pay for it." He threw a five-dollar bill on the table.

Mrs. Conkle recognized him from the pictures which had been published in all the papers the last two days. He didn't appear to be the savage killer the papers said he was. He looked like a man who was wary of life. He also looked cold and hungry. Mrs. Conkle nevertheless was frightened.

"Sit down," she said in a trembling voice. "I'll fix you something."

While he was eating, Mrs. Conkle stole to the telephone in another room and called the police.

"He's here," she stammered out. "That man. Floyd. Please come quickly. Hurry. Hurry."

FBI Agents responded immediately, the entire team that had searched for him the past two days, and surrounded the farm house.

"Come out, Floyd," Purvis yelled, "with your hands up!"

Floyd leaped from the table, guns in his hands, looked at Mrs. Conkle with murder in his eyes. "You bitch!"

Mrs. Conkle ran screaming from the room.

Floyd looked out the back door. One agent. He decided to try it. There was nothing else he could do. He dashed out, his guns firing as he ran. The lone agent at the rear of the house returned the fire, and then the other agents joined him, firing as they ran.

When the first series of slugs hit

Floyd he screamed like a mortally wounded tiger that had been slashed by its intended kill. He stumbled and fell to the ground, blood pouring from his mouth.

He rose and ran, his stiffly sullen face twisted in a deathlike agony, his eyes bulging and swollen with the fear that had lived inside of him for the past half dozen years.

More slugs hit him and his lips crawled back over his teeth and his tongue came out and dripped blood over his chin. Still more slugs hit him but he kept on running, staggering and stumbling like a man dizzy with drink who was fighting desperately to keep his feet.

Floyd tried to let out a last defiant yell, to fire a last volley of shots at his tormenting pursuers but he didn't have the strength for either. The last volley of shots struck him but he felt no pain, no shock, no resistance toward life. He stood where he was for several seconds and then he seemed to collapse in sections, his knees, torso, and the head crimson with blood.

When he struck the ground he was dead.

Pretty Boy Floyd was twenty-nine years old when he died in a strange field, in a strange town, in a state whose vengeance he had twice escaped.

In the Next Issue—Complete and Exclusively Yours—

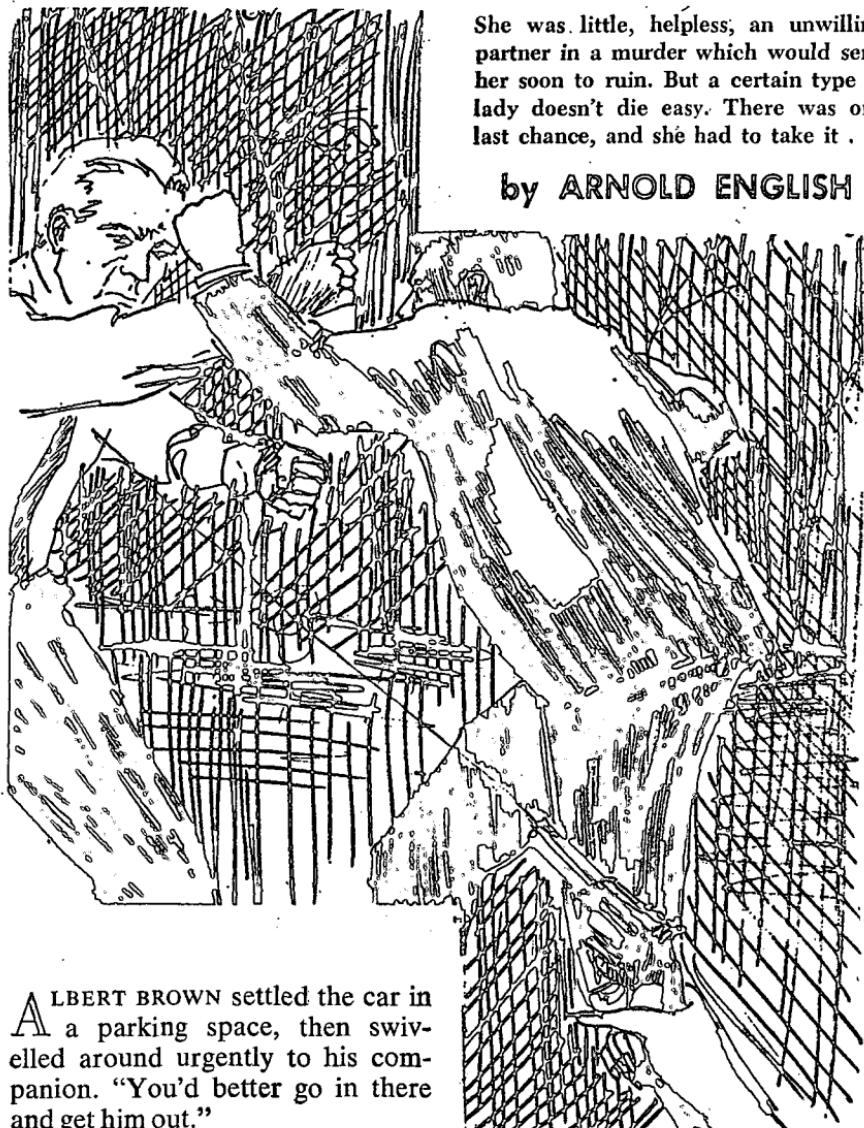
Another TRUE CRIME STORY Masterpiece

ARIZONA "MA" BARKER: THE DEVIL'S DAUGHTER

by DAVID MAZROFF

Squat, animal-like Ma Barker would give herself to anything in trousers. Anything except a cop—whom she would kill on sight! From the Panhandle to Florida, the devil's daughter and her evil brood killed and ravaged and spread fear across the land, flinging a challenge to Death itself to do her will. Half animal, half madwoman, she truly killed to live and lived to kill. Don't miss this story about the world's most evil woman!

Never Kill a Victim



She was little, helpless, an unwilling partner in a murder which would send her soon to ruin. But a certain type of lady doesn't die easy. There was one last chance, and she had to take it . . .

by ARNOLD ENGLISH

ALBERT BROWN settled the car in a parking space, then swivelled around urgently to his companion. "You'd better go in there and get him out."

"I suppose so," Laura Dermody agreed nervously, darting a hand through her jet-black hair and down the back of her long, graceful neck. She closed the car door softly and looked around at the roadhouse fifty yards away. Her face glowed from the mechanical reflection of the neon sign: *Punchinello's. Dine. Dance.*

There was the sound of laughter when she opened the outside door a couple of minutes afterwards and when she opened it again later on. A man was next to her in the lighted doorway. Two pairs of footsteps came along a gravel pathway then, and over to the parking lot.

Tom Ulric stood in front of Brown's car and moved back and forth as if he were drunk. His blond hair fell halfway down to his deep-set, burning eyes. He was breathing heavily.

"You want your money back!" He grinned, slurring the words together. "Laura and Bert want their money back."

"Miss Dermody put up fifty thousand dollars, and I did, too, because we were certain that you'd invest it properly for us. You took it for yourself. Now Miss Dermody wants her shares back and I want mine."

"That's tough on her," Ulric grinned. "And you."

Brown lunged out of his car and practically pushed Ulric towards it, Ulric protesting much more than Brown's impact against him made

necessary. Laura, her blue dress crinkling as she leaned forward in the dimness, said, "Go easy on him, Mr. Brown. Please don't hurt him."

Brown finally pushed Ulric into the seat next to the one he'd be taking, and slammed the door shut. He walked around noisily to the driver's door, then opened and closed it with savage fury. The car started with a teeth-gritting mesh of gears.

"Home, James," Ulric said in that drunken tone he was using too broadly. He belched loudly and unnecessarily.

Brown drove along a wide road past the outskirts of town. Ulric stopped singing to ask loudly, "Where you taking me?"

"To a quiet place where we'll talk," Brown said grimly.

"Talk? You sound like you're going to try and beat the money out of me. Let me get away from here!"

"Don't try anything," Brown said. "I can knock you out if I have to, and I've given Miss Dermody a gun that she's carrying in her pocketbook, and she won't hesitate to use it."

Ulric laughed. "She'll never hurt me, never, never."

"She will when fifty thousand dollars are concerned," Brown told him. "And if you think I'm going to let an old friendship stand in the way of the fifty thousand you took from me, then you're mistaken about that, too."

"I want out of here," Ulric bellowed.

The shifting weight of his body signaled that he was going to make a grab toward the car's wheel. Brown was given more than enough time to stop at the side of the road and turn to meet Ulric's body with his own. He raised a fist and grunted before letting it travel towards Ulric, who pulled back and called out loudly just the same when he was touched by the tip of it.

Ulric reached both hands around Brown's neck. The pressure was a shade harder than Brown would have expected; Tom Ulric generally annoyed him by making things a little too realistic.

Ulric's weight was on him, and the two men were grunting and swearing. Brown raised his head and called to Laura, "The gun, the gun."

Laura Dermody's fear showed in her, despair curling her lips. She pulled the gleaming .25 out of her pocketbook and pointed it wildly.

"Get away from him," she called. "Don't fight with him, please."

Brown called out, "The gun. Shoot!"

Laura Dermody quavered as she said, "I'll shoot, Tom. I swear I'll shoot."

Brown's gurgle could hardly be made out, even by Brown himself, because Ulric was shouting hoarsely: "I'll fix you good."

And he sounded as if he meant it. The pressure on Brown was increased; not dangerously, of course.

But Ulric was throwing himself into the part even more vigorously than usual. Brown could hardly hide his anger.

Laura fired at last. Tom Ulric gasped loudly, almost deafening Brown for seconds. Then Ulric arched his back and clasped a hand across his chest. A red stain that looked like anything but ketchup appeared on the shirt-front. Ulric became quiet.

Laura asked, "Did I—did I—"

Brown was careful to let her watch him feel the pulse on Ulric's wrist. "He's dead, and there goes our hundred thousand dollars."

"Is that all you can think of at a time like this?" Laura Dermody asked shakily.

"Each of us gave him fifty thousand in cash, and I didn't care about anything else. How—well, you were seen coming to get him in that night spot."

Laura Dermody gasped, then dropped the gun with blanks in it and put both hands to her mouth to keep from screaming.

"I was probably seen threatening him at the parking place and pushing him into the car," Brown went on. "There's only one way to help ourselves and I don't like it any more than you will. But there's no choice."

"You mean, go back to that

night club and act as if nothing happened?"

"No, of course not," Brown said in real alarm. "But I've got some winter equipment in the car and this won't take long to arrange."

He got out of the car, opened the trunk and took out a shovel. Then he walked away and past a line of gaunt trees. When he knew that she couldn't see him any longer, Brown shovelled enough earth to get the implement dirty. He walked back to the car.

Laura Dermody glanced down at the shovel, and kept herself from crying out. "Are you going to—to bury him?"

"There's no choice, like I said." Brown noticed that Ulric lay back with eyes open, and made a point out of closing them. "Give me a few minutes and I'll be right back."

He lifted Ulric onto a shoulder and carried him past the line of trees. Ulric caught his balance as soon as he was dropped to his feet and glanced around disapprovingly at the various small holes—he had told Brown more than once that things would look more realistic at this stage of a swindle if his partner dug an actual grave.

But he extended a hand for the handshake that had always been part of the team's ritual at this point, and Brown turned away without accepting it. As Ulric walked off silently, Brown purposefully ran back to the car.

"I'm planning to forget my fifty

thousand and beat it out of this town," he told the girl as soon as he had rejoined her. "I'd advise you to do exactly the same thing."

ALBERT BROWN got to his home in the next state a couple of days afterwards. He lolled around it as usual when a job had been finished, tending to the postage-stamp sized garden while he waited for Ulric to arrive with the fifty thousand in loot. Ulric didn't arrive.

A letter addressed to him arrived several days later; the handwriting seemed unfamiliar.

The letter was addressed to him in the name of Albert Brown, which wasn't his real name, and he had to persuade the postman to give it to him. The signature at the letter's foot was, "Laura D".

I must tell you that I decided to ignore your advice about not going back to the Punchinello night club, and when I did I saw Tom Ulric at the bar, bragging that he'd had a marvelous escape from death. I hurried outside, sure he hadn't seen me, and waited. When he appeared, I realized he could do us a lot of harm by prosecuting and, certain I had an alibi, I finished the job I'd started before. Only this time, to make sure it would be all right, I used a nail file, which is very sharp. I didn't miss.

Brown read the letter over many times, then shuddered and destroyed it.

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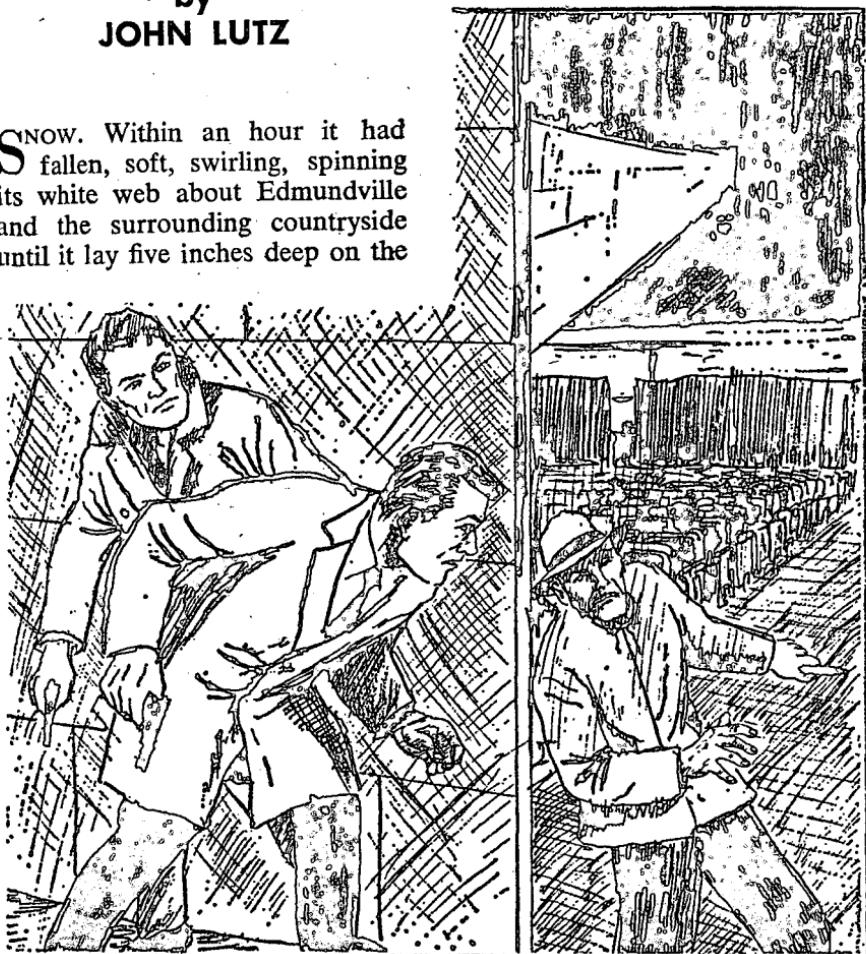
April—1968

Death on the Silver Screen

Somewhere in that darkened theater a desperate man waited to make his last kill. No one could stop him. Unless . . .

by
JOHN LUTZ

SNOW. Within an hour it had fallen, soft, swirling, spinning its white web about Edmundville and the surrounding countryside until it lay five inches deep on the



farmland and in the town streets. But it was Saturday night, and though white flakes still swirled in the bitter cold air, the Royal Theatre, the only theatre in Edmundville, was filled to half capacity with almost four hundred people who had paid to see the first local showing of "Safari Love." One of those people—maybe—was Ray Hatten.

"I tell you it is him!" Off-duty deputy Burt Kline was almost shouting at the sheriff. "I was sittin' almost next to him when I happened to look over and I knew in a flash! He's on an aisle seat on the right side, five rows from the front. An' he don't suspect a thing, I swear he don't!"

Newly elected sheriff Wilson Parker had registered surprise and alarm when Kline first suggested Ray Hatten might be in the Royal Theatre, but now he sat back calmly and tried to assimilate facts from Kline's torrent of information.

Wilson Parker was no ordinary small town sheriff. Lean and personable, thirty years old and a recent law school graduate, he was a man many people had marked for a political future.

While Kline was talking, Parker reached into the breast pocket of his brown uniform shirt for a cigarette and thoughtfully accepted the flame from the lighter that was in his deputy's trembling hand.

It was difficult to believe that

Ray Hatten, the most wanted criminal in the history of the state, possibly the country, was right here in Edmundville at the old Royal. Hatten, an ex-infantry sharpshooter, had started with a multiple murder in California, then in stolen cars had cut a bloody path eastward, plundering and killing. Including the three in California, his total death count stood at seven and one pending in a hospital in Phoenix. One of those seven was a policeman who had made the mistake of thinking Hatten carried only one gun.

Then had come the murder of a school girl in Cliffordson, which Hatten was strongly suspected of, and an armed robbery east and out of state that suggested Hatten had moved on toward the eastern seaboard. By now he was supposed to be in New York.

"My God, Sheriff," Kline was saying, his heavy face red with excitement, "what are you gonna do?"

Parker stood and reached for a heavy mackinaw that would cover his sheriff's badge and revolver. "The only thing to do is go and look the situation over, make sure it's really Hatten. You get Sandy and as many reserve deputies as you can line up and I'll meet you at the Royal."

Kline already had the door open.

"And, Burt," Parker said, blue eyes serious in his lean face, "don't

do anything rash unless I give the word. Okay?"

"Sure, Sheriff," Kline said. The door was shut and he was gone.

Few people were on State Highway 47, Edmundville's main street, as Parker trudged through the snow toward the Royal. In his teens he'd worked as an usher at the old theatre. He was trying to recall every facet of its construction, just in case a plan of action was needed. The Royal was an ancient theatre, dating back to the thirties, and in all that time there had been no major change in its simple, one-story design. Lack of competition had preserved it through the years.

In the empty lobby, Parker explained things to Rog Hopper, the Royal's manager. Then he casually walked down a side aisle to cross below and in front of the screen, then to walk up the right center aisle past the man Kline said was Hatten. Parker would appear to be a man just getting up to go to the restroom, or to the lobby to smoke a cigarette. Or, if he'd been seen coming down the side aisle, a man searching the darkness for his children or wife.

Parker was careful to glance only once, and swiftly, but in that split second he was sure the man was Hatten. The fugitive looked exactly like his newspaper pictures, broad shouldered and heavy featured, straight black hair over pale eyes in a pale face, eyes that

were fixed on, but not looking at, the sunny Amazon jungle scene on the screen. And he was wearing a dark colored windbreaker too thin for the weather outside.

Without looking back, Parker walked slowly up the aisle to the lighted lobby.

"It's him," he said to Rog Hopper.

Hopper's complexion blanched. "Good Lord, does he suspect he's been spotted?"

"I don't know," Parker said. "I don't think so." Though the lobby was empty, he kept his voice low.

Hopper lowered his voice in accordance with Parker. "What are we gonna do, Park?"

Parker walked to the glass double doors and peered out at the falling snow. "In a few minutes Sandy, Burt Kline and the rest of the deputies will be here," he said. "You meet them and tell them to stay in the lobby. Tell them not to make a move until I come back."

"You want me to keep an eye on Hatten in the meantime?"

"That's the very last thing I want," Parker said. "He's worse than nitroglycerin; you only have to look at him wrong and he'll explode in there with about four hundred people."

"But what do I do if Hatten comes up here for a smoke or something?"

"He's not likely to. He doesn't want to be spotted. But if he does, you go outside and meet Sandy



and the boys and tell them to wait out there out of sight from the front doors."

"It's ten above zero out there, Park!"

"I know," Parker said, "but I'm more interested in keeping people at ninety-eight point six." He buttoned his heavy mackinaw. "I'm going to the office to contact the State Patrol and the F.B.I. I'll be back within ten minutes." He stepped out into the neon lit winter night beyond the doors and disappeared.

When Parker returned to the Royal his chief deputy, Sandy Jackson, and three other deputies were standing in a corner of the lobby. Only Jackson was uniformed.

"He didn't come up here while you were gone," Rog Hopper said nervously twisting the large ring on his finger.

"Relax, Rog," Parker said. He turned to Sandy Jackson. "You know who we got down there?"

Jackson nodded. "Help coming?"

"Both the State Patrol and the F.B.I.," Parker said. "But it'll be at least a half hour before anybody gets here. The roads farther east are covered with almost a foot of snow. That's probably why Hatten's here. Couldn't risk traveling in this weather and doubled back toward Cliffordson to confuse the police."

Parker looked around suddenly. "Where's Burt Kline?"

Jackson's barrel chest expanded as he took a deep breath. "I was waiting for you to ask that." He nodded his tousled head toward the darkened auditorium. "He's down there a few rows from the back. I don't know what's got into him. He says the only thing to do is walk right down to Hatten, put a gun to the back of his head and make him surrender."

Parker bit his lower lip and his eyes narrowed. He was cursing himself for accepting Kline as a deputy. He'd always known the man was too excitable and unpredictable.

"The damned idiot!" he said. Then he calmed himself. "What's he waiting for?"

Jackson's voice was without a sign of the stress showing in his face. "He said he'd wait fifteen minutes so you'd be here to take charge of the prisoner."

"That was considerate of him," Parker said. He looked at Rog

Hopper. "Go down there, Rog, and tell Kline I said to get his—tell him I said to get back up here in the lobby."

Hopper walked quickly to the nearest of the four exit arches. Then he stopped, ran halfway back frantically and almost fell on the lobby carpet as he motioned desperately to Parker.

"Kline just stood up." Hopper yelled in a hoarse whisper. "Quick! He's walkin' down!"

Parker swallowed dryly and drew his pistol from its leather holster. "Sandy, you're uniformed, so stay out of sight. Better still, take Garfield and go out and cover the exits."

To the remaining two deputies he said, "Each of you stand at the head of one of the end aisles. I'll take the right center aisle. Keep your revolvers ready but out of sight and when Kline puts that gun to Hatten's head, move down there quick and settle that crowd."

He was walking across the lobby. "And for God's sake," he said over his shoulder, "don't use those guns unless I fire a shot!"

His heart pounding, Parker stood with his mackinaw buttoned, his revolver held loosely behind his leg, and watched Kline's dumpy figure walk slowly down the right center aisle toward Hatten. He was halfway down, using a box of popcorn as an innocent looking prop. His right hand was in his suitcoat pocket, and Parker was sure the

deputy's finger would be on the trigger.

When Kline was about ten rows behind Hatten, the fugitive's head turned momentarily and Kline's steps faltered. Parker looked quickly at his two deputies and saw that they too had seen what had happened. *He's on to him*, Wilson Parker thought, his heart skipping a beat. But Hatten was again watching the screen and Kline was walking forward, as if nothing had happened.

Suddenly Hatten twisted in his seat, leaning his body almost casually out into the aisle, and a gunshot barked.

Kline fell stiffly, straight backward onto the carpeted, slanted aisle, popcorn scattering over the chest of his tweed suitcoat, inanely reminding Parker of grotesque funeral spray petals.

Parker and the theatre audience snapped out of their shock at the same time. They were snapped out of it by a screaming voice from the narrow stage in front of the screen.

"Cool it everybody! Back down in your seats!"

Parker was astonished to see Ray Hatten standing boldly before the screen with a nickel-plated revolver in each hand. And suddenly one of those guns was pointed at Parker.

"You three guys!" Hatten yelled. "I know you're fuzz and I know you got the exits blocked! Now do

what I say or I'll fire into the audience! Drop those guns you got behind you, back into the lobby and shut them doors! Only leave those doors on the left exit open!"

"Do it!" Parker yelled. He dropped his own gun in the center of the aisle, where Hatten could see it, backed up three steps and swung the two wooden doors shut across the exit arch.

There were alarmed murmurs from the audience. The projectionist cut the sound of the movie and the wail of a baby cut through everyone's vibrating nerves. Then the baby was silent.

The whole theatre beyond the closed doors was silent.

"Good Lord," Rog Hopper said. "What a damn crazy thing to do!"

"A damn smart thing to do," Parker said bitterly. "If he'd done anything else he'd have been dead by now."

Hearing the gunfire and shouting, Sandy Jackson had left Garfield to cover the side exits and rushed back into the lobby.

"Why didn't he want those end doors shut?" he asked, his voice still amazingly calm.

"That side door in the corner beyond them leads to the stairs to the projectionist's booth," Parker said. "The booth is the one place we might be able to get a shot at him from, but now he's got it cut off."

"You mean Hatten cased this place?" one of the deputies asked incredulously.

"He's been on the run for over a month," Parker said. "He's no idiot."

"Is anybody up there now?" Sandy Jackson asked.

"Old Ed, the projectionist," Hopper said breathlessly. "He doesn't have a gun though."

"Good," Parker said. "I don't think the light from the projector is bright enough to keep Hatten from seeing someone taking aim at him anyway. And if someone did get a shot away from the projection booth it would have to be perfect. Even dying, Hatten could empty those revolvers into the audience."

"What about Kline?" one of the deputies asked.

"I think he's dead," Parker said bluntly. "But if he is only wounded, we still can't make a deal that will turn that maniac loose on society again."

They stood in thoughtful silence while Parker tried to recall some way to conceal himself in the auditorium, some small bit of cover that would enable a man to take careful aim without being seen. But he could think of none. The Royal was a simple rectangular building without alcoves or protruding fancy trim.

"Ed!" Rog Hopper shouted suddenly in near hysteria. He pointed a trembling finger. "Ed, get back!"

Parker looked to see Ed Noonan, the old projectionist of the Royal, opening the door to the pro-

jection booth stairs. His white hair was unruly and he looked puzzled. As he took his first step across the lobby he began to ask something, but a bullet in the head interrupted him. He took three wobbly, staggering steps away from the deadly open doors to the auditorium and fell forward.

Parker and a deputy ran to the old man and pulled him toward the center of the lobby.

"He's still breathing," Parker said, amazed that it was so with the amount of blood soaking into the lobby carpet. He turned to Sandy Jackson. "Call an ambulance."

Then Parker heard a sound that chilled him. The audience, like one huge, frightened animal, was murmuring and moaning in fear, the sound of dozens of sobbing women underlying the buzz of prayers and frightened conversation. Parker was suddenly sharply aware that whatever was done to get Hatten must be done in a way that wouldn't send four hundred people stampeding in fright toward the narrow exits.

Then he heard the faint sound of Hatten yelling.

"Head fuzz!" the fugitive was screaming. "I wanna talk to you!"

Parker straightened and walked slowly to the open doors by the projection booth stairs, motioning everyone else to stay back. Then he stood framed in the doorway, a perfect target, noticing with horror

that his left foot was resting in a small puddle of blood.

Hatten was strutting back and forth on the stage. Behind him the newest Hollywood find, Tad Montgomery, was making silent love to a young European actress. Though Hatten was crazed with desperation, Parker saw with amazement that the murderer was actually enjoying his spectacular predicament. Even through his fright, the man's fantastic ego was making itself seen.

A gleaming revolver was aimed at Parker and Hatten grinned behind it. The grin was strikingly incongruous to the panic in his eyes. "You the sheriff, man?"

"I am." Parker's voice was too high.

Hatten's grin widened, then quickly disappeared. "I'm in a hell of a fix, ain't I, Fuzz?"

Parker was silent.

"Well, let me tell you, Fuzz, you're in a hell of a fix yourself. Now this here picture's over in about fifteen minutes, and you got that much time to do like I say or a lot of these people are gonna die. I guess you noticed I ain't a bad shot."

Behind him, Parker could hear the noises of the stretcher bearers working to carry the old man out.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"You," Hatten said, "handcuffed and walking down that aisle. Then you an' me'll walk out of here together, get in a patrol car

with snow tires and drive out of town."

Parker stood clenching and unclenching his hands, knowing that he couldn't do it, knowing that it was his duty *not* to do it, and knowing that there were ten bullets left in those ludicrous silver revolvers.

"Let us get Kline, the first man you shot, and I'll think about it," Parker said.

"He don't enter into it," Hatten said contemptuously. "He's dead. I don't miss at that range." Then he laughed loudly, the laugh of a frightened man. "If it'll make you feel any better I'll put another bullet in him to make sure."

He looked out at the terror stricken audience for some kind of perverse approval and his face became serious again. Then he let one of the pistols suddenly twirl downward around his trigger finger, bringing a gasp from the audience. He toyed with the gun, letting it dangle upside down while he made a slow sweeping motion across the audience with the revolver in his other hand.

"Now back out of here, Fuzz. You ain't got long to think about what I said."

"He's half crazy!" Rog Hopper said as Parker stepped back into the lobby.

"So is the audience," Parker said.

"Isn't there any place in there a man could get a good shot at him from?" Sandy asked.

Parker shook his head. "Even if there were, the firing might stampede the audience and take more lives than Hatten could. Anyway, he'd have to be hit perfectly and by complete surprise or he'd get some shots away before he died."

The sheriff put a hand on Rog Hopper's shoulder. "When's this movie over—exactly?"

Hopper looked at his watch. "Ten minutes."

Parker breathed deeply and wiped a sweat-damp hand across his face.

"Don't the light from the projector bother him enough to keep him from seeing somebody in the back of the show?" one of the deputies asked.

"You saw how much it bothered him," Parker said.

He was remembering the times he'd been up on the stage as an usher when he was young. The light from the projector came down from too great an angle to affect the vision of a man on the stage unless he looked directly at it.

"Damn it!" Jackson said. "How about a stage door or something?"

"There's nothing," Hopper said hopelessly. "Only some steps at each side of the stage."

Sandy Jackson glanced at his wrist watch and looked at Parker. "You can't go with him, you know." This time his voice betrayed emotion.

"I know," Parker said. "I don't intend to."

Then Wilson Parker was actually smiling.

Hopper wrung his hands. "You gone out of your head, Park? I don't see anything funny about this."

Parker's smile faded to seriousness. "You got a key to that back door?"

"Sure," Hopper said, "but that's just an old store room. You can't get at him from there."

"Get me the key," Parker said. He was staring thoughtfully out the theatre's doors at the still-falling snow. "Sandy, drive over to the office and get me my new repeating rifle. And put a silencer on it."

"A silencer?"

"Make it as fast as you can," Parker said. "I'll meet you around back."

He began to button his jacket.

The audience at the Royal Theatre was looking up at Ray Hatten, who was standing with his feet wide, the shining revolvers in his hands at his sides, when suddenly the gunman's body trembled. His face distorted, he began to jerk about the stage in violent spasms, a marionette gone mad. Then he pitched forward and lay still.

All this happened silently, within the space of a few seconds, leaving the audience more surprised than frightened. They stared

numbly as the camera zoomed in for the final close up of Tad Montgomery, noticing that the new star had suddenly developed a bad case of acne.

On the dust-covered wood floor behind the taut, bleached canvas screen, Parker lay with his cheek resting on the hard stock of his rifle. He'd gotten low and aimed at an upward angle, well above the heads of the audience, and then waited for the precise moment when both of Hatten's hands were down at his sides. Aiming carefully at the dark, bigger than life silhouette, starting at the head and working downward, he'd squeezed off shot after shot until the rifle had jammed.

He'd seen the silhouette jerk about, trying to raise its hands, seen one hand raise only after the gun it was holding had dropped. And then the silhouette had disappeared, the raised hand flying upward in what reminded Wilson Parker of an insane, uncoordinated Nazi salute.

Parker lay still, breathing deep relief, aware of the increasing brightness about him as the projector brightened to close-up intensity. Then he gradually became aware of a softer light as the immense, red-hued letters magically appeared before and above him:



**The
Moving
Finger
by
JOSEPH
COMMINGS**

*"She is beautiful," the sheik said. "She is also
unfaithful. Find the man. I will do the rest!"*

THE BIG electric fans churned the suffocating desert air down from the smoky blue ceiling onto the three people around the low banquet table below. Sitting on cushions around the feast were the senator, the sheik, and the American girl.

U.S. Senator Brooks U. Banner was a big fat man wearing an old-

fashioned, enormously wrinkled white suit. After an inspection of the fighting areas in Viet Nam, he was on his way back home. He had a "standing invite" to drop in on the Iraqi oil sheik. Now there was an added attraction. Six months ago Sheik Ali Sa'ab had married an American girl.

Bernice was tall, blonde, and

beautiful, presiding like a perfect hostess over the roast lamb, rice, spices and yoghourt.

At the end of the meal she rose, smiling.

"*Hamdullah*," she said dutifully, the way every Moslem ended a meal. "I will leave you gentlemen to your drinks and chess."

They watched her walk away, the down-drafts flowing through her soft white garments, until she disappeared like a genie in the wavering haze of the bronze filigree braziers.

The sheik leaned forward, his bearded head muffled in the folds of his *keffiyah*. He had something more deeply personal on his mind than a chess problem. "She is unfaithful."

"What's that?" Banner stared, a Pittsburgh stogie clamped in his teeth. "Who with?"

"I don't know." The black eyes, hanging in the wrinkled leathery face, glittered venomously. "I ask you to help me find out."

"Don't appeal to my morals." Banner sipped his cloudy potent *arak*. "I haven't any."

The sheik tasted his bitter tar-black coffee and lit a long Turkish cigarette. "Then let me appeal to your deductive analysis. In the old days I would have been a Caliph and you would be my Grand Vizier. That is no small honor. I would pick the most acute brain in the kingdom."

Soft soaping me, thought Ban-

ner. His frosty little blue eyes watched the dark-skinned face. "What makes you think she's—"

"Anouk, her old serving woman, told me. *B'Illah!* There's loyalty! The man is one of the three young Americans I have helping me run my oil company. All three of them work and sleep in the administrative wing. It's not far from here. Bernice, in a weak moment when she needed a confidant, told Anouk that she was having an intrigue with a man she had known back in the United States before she married me. Under my nose"—it was a sharp proud beak—"they are passing messages back and forth. Meetings in secret places. Only she didn't tell Anouk with which one."

Banner said slyly, "So you want me to help you find out. Let me warn you, Ali. I'm all in favor of young romance. What's an old rummy like you want with a girl like that?"

"I've offered her all the delights of the perfumed garden."

"Fah!" snorted Banner. "Sand and flies! And all this heat!"

"I've given her clothing, jewels, motorcars. Even air conditioning. It's just been installed," he said enthusiastically. "Tomorrow I will throw the master switch that will cool the whole palace."

"Maybe old Anouk is jealous," suggested Banner. "she could be lying."

The sheik shook his hooded

head. "She has watched Bernice. During the hottest part of the day, when everyone else rests and sleeps, Bernice goes down the corridor where the Americans work, stopping off at each office."

"Are the men there at the time?"

"No," said the sheik, "the men are absent. Bernice goes into each office for perhaps a few minutes, then emerges. She carries nothing in except her handbag, and nothing out. Yet I am fully convinced that they communicate with each other in one of these offices."

"Why're you so sure?"

"No man approaches her. Not during the day. She receives no letters or notes. No telephone calls."

"What're these offices like?"

"Very simple. A desk, a chair, a telephone, a typewriter, a filing cabinet. I've examined all of these things, even before Bernice has entered, but they reveal nothing."

"Yet you still feel that there's writing left there somewhere?"

"I'm positive. But where? I've searched and searched. There is nothing written on the walls, floor, or ceiling. Once, after Bernice had returned to her own rooms, Anouk looked through her handbag. The only strange article that she found in it was a piece of chalk."

"Chalk!" Banner's fat body gave a forward bounce. "There's one significance about chalk."

"What is it?"

"It can be easily rubbed out again." He peered around myster-

iously. "Did you try following her?"

"Impossible! I cast too large a shadow."

"Hire somebody to do it."

"I will tell no one about this folly except you. It could become the choice gossip of the bazaars."

"Suppose I find out which one it is." Banner shifted the cigar in his mouth. "What'll you do?"

"I will eliminate him," said the sheik fiercely.

Banner's furry black eyebrows joggled. "Eliminate?"

"In the old days he would be drawn and quartered." Obviously he regretted the passing of the old days. "Now I will have him banished from Iraq. Once he has gone, she will return all her affection to me."

Wishful thinking indeed, Banner thought. But this was a stickler to solve. He couldn't resist the challenge. And he had a curious interest in this ghostly young man who was out to steal the old desert hawk's darling, a young man he had never seen and perhaps never would.

He struggled to his feet. "Okay, Ali, let's take a look."

Slowly and thoughtfully they walked through the moonlit garden to the administrative wing of the palace.

"Why don't you fire all three of 'em?" Banner suggested.

The sheik spread out his hands helplessly. "Then I would have no

one at all to run my oil business."

The three offices off the corridor were, as the sheik had described them, small, neat, and almost identical. Banner entered each one, standing there with his fists on his hips, staring around.

They reached the third one. There were twin electric switches just inside the door. The sheik reached in and flicked one.

Banner stared around and up.

"I've noticed," he said, "that there's something that you can see —yet you can't see."

"Invisible writing?"

"In a way. Who uses this office?"

"Gordon Cook."

"Does he always leave his fan running?"

"Sometimes he is forgetful." The sheik reached out for the second switch.

"Yes," drawled Banner. "Turn it off. And look!"

The big four-bladed fan suspended from the ceiling whirred to a stop.

The sheik's black eyes were on it, staring.

"The fan!" he cried out.

"Chalk writing on the blades. Ali. You can't see it while the fan's in motion. All they had to do to reach it was stand up on the desk."

"*B'Illah!*" The sheik was straining his eyes up. "What does it say?"

"Air conditioning operative tomorrow. Fan messages will be obsolete. Why stay any longer, love? Meet me at Baghdad Airport for the 10:30 flight out."

The sheik cried out: "He's running away with her! I'll stop them! What time is it?"

Banner hauled out a ponderous pocket watch and held it up.

The sheik looked at it with a frightful groan.

It was already 10:45.

Coming Soon: A Great New Crime Story by a Great Writer

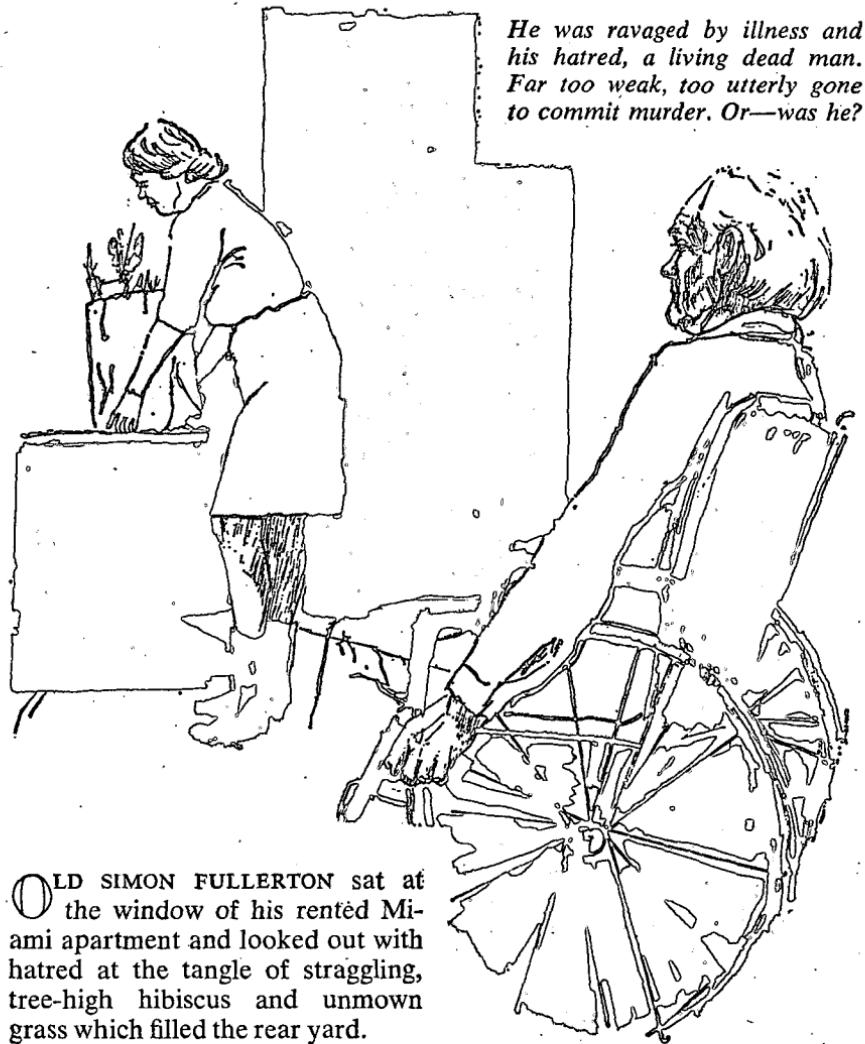
THE CONSPIRATORS

In human form, or animal, but beast in any case—who—or what—had crept by night under the Big Top and bludgeoned fiery Manfredo to his death? Many men had tried to solve the bloody riddle—but only a little boy dared to guess the truth.

By MICHAEL GILBERT

JUST ANOTHER PERFECT CRIME

by EDWARD Y. BREESE



He was ravaged by illness and his hatred, a living dead man. Far too weak, too utterly gone to commit murder. Or—was he?

OLD SIMON FULLERTON sat at the window of his rented Miami apartment and looked out with hatred at the tangle of straggling, tree-high hibiscus and unmown grass which filled the rear yard.

Stifling wet heat blanketed the big old frame house on its unkempt lot. Just across North River Drive a dirty mist smoked the surface of the Miami River and softened the lines of the rotting hulks moored against its banks.

Simon had retired to Florida; but not to a life of luxury.

He sat in his wheel chair and looked out. Constantly, endlessly, he shook with the ravages of the disease which was slowly killing him. Simon was close to the final stages of Parkinson's disease.

Day and night his limbs and the flesh of his body shook and crawled on his old bones. Only in sleep could he find a little relief. He could only walk a little now. Mostly he rolled the wheel chair.

Worst of all was the endless, remorseless trembling that had almost destroyed the usefulness of his hands. He could no longer write or brush his teeth or manage a button. Most of the time he let Emma feed him, though he could manage a large spoon with concentration and immense effort. Lately he almost never tried to use the hands at all except when he was entirely alone. He had his own reasons.

He was alone now. Emma had gone shopping downtown. The two young couples who rented the first floor apartments were at work. His neighbor across the second floor hall, old Albury, was doubtless asleep at this time of day. He worked as night man at a gas sta-

tion some place in town. Simon had time to get ready for Emma's return.

In a way, he knew inside himself, he had been getting ready for this moment all his life. The lonely, ugly child had hated his parents and had had no friends at school. The awkward, grasping young man had envied and hated his bosses. The half-successful business man had had no friends in the dingy, northern industrial town which he called home. The inarticulate, fumbling search for something only half understood which had prompted him to marry Emma had led inevitably to this moment.

He was ready at last. As soon as Emma returned he was going to kill her. It didn't matter in the least to him that this must be almost his last major act. To his hatred and fear it appeared as an act that would crown and culminate his life.

Simon Fullerton had hated and cheated and hurt his fellows all his life, but he had never yet dared the ultimate act. He had never dared to deliberately kill. In some twisted way which only he could grasp; this killing was a final test to which he must put his strength and cleverness.

He was justified, in his own mind. She kept the money—his small annuity, his government check, and the few thousand she had inherited from her parents—tightly under her own control.

He knew why. She wanted

something for herself when the disease had killed him off. Well, he'd show her. He'd get out of this miserable hole into a comfortable convalescent home.

He'd be tended by a young nurse, and be free of Emma's grudging, slipshod care. There'd be enough to last the short time till he



died. If not, the State would put him somewhere. He'd have had his fling.

Best of all; he'd show her. He'd have the laugh on her and everyone else in the world. Hatred is not logical.

She was coming now. He heard her steps on the broad wooden porch below and in the hall. Silently he wheeled his chair into position facing the door from the front room into the upstairs hall, where she would come in.

The checkered butt of the old fashioned, long barrelled .38 Smith & Wesson revolver was firm in his hand. That was impossible. Everybody but Simon would know it was impossible with the palsy that never let him go. He would not tell his secret—the way that his keen and brilliant mind had found for him.

He waited while she came into

the room. As he knew she would, she left the door ajar while she took three steps left to the table and set down the new slip and the paper sack of groceries.

When she turned and really saw him it was too late.

With something close to happiness he saw her eyes widen and her mouth shape to scream.

Simon fired three times. The bullets struck so close together that the entrance wounds could be covered by the palm of a hand. They ripped her heart apart. There was no time to scream. The shock of impact slammed her thin body back against the wall before it crumpled to the worn straw mat on the floor.

Simon had no time to gloat. He had to get the gun wiped clean with the towel that normally draped his trembling neck and shoulders in the heat. Then he dropped it on the body, so it would not thump on the floor, and backed his chair towards the kitchen door.

As he expected, through the partly open door, he heard muffled noises from across the hall as old Albury scrambled out of bed. Then he heard something he hadn't expected at all. From the back-stair landing at the rear of the hall came a human gasp of fear. Feet pounded down the stairs. The back door rattled, held, rattled again. Then the old iron bolt rasped back and someone scrambled through. Luck was with Simon. Instead of a name-

less prowler, Fate had supplied him with a scapegoat.

"Help," Simon yelled. "Help! Murder! Help!"

He shot his wheel chair backward until he could see out of the rear kitchen window and recognize the man running hard for the tangle of bushes at the rear of the yard. It was, as he had known it would be, the slow-witted Andy who sporadically worked around the yard and house and kept up the property for the owner. Apparently he had been coming in for some minor job which Simon had not known about.

By this time Pop Albury had crossed the hall and run into the apartment. Simon pointed shakily out the window.

"Stop him!" he yelled. "There he goes. Stop him! Murderer!"

Pop was too late to see anything but thrashing shrubbery to mark the man's passage. "It was Andy. I recognized him. He killed her," Simon said.

He said the same thing to the policemen from Homicide when they arrived. "He must have followed her in. He had a gun—that one there—and he told her to get all the money she had hid here. She tried to say there wasn't any, and he got mad. She was scared; so I guess he thought she was going to scream. That's when he shot her. Just like that. I hope he burns. Poor Emma."

The big plainclothes detective, Lieutenant Ryan, listened while

another man took it all down. When questioned, Pop Albury confirmed that he had heard a man run out of the house, and that, when he reached the kitchen, Simon was in a position where he could have seen anyone in the back yard.

"I don't think it could have been Andy, though," Pop went on. "Andy wasn't real bright, but I've gotten to know him pretty well in four years in this house. I could swear he's no killer. For that matter I don't think he has any armed robbery in his makeup, either."

"When we catch him," Ryan said, "he'd better hope a jury likes him as well as you do. Particularly if this old cannon can be traced to him."

"It will be," Simon stated confidently. He knew it wouldn't, but it couldn't be traced to him either. He'd bought it thirty-five years before off a traveling man who'd lost money at poker and needed a fast ten bucks. There was no record.

The man who had been dusting the gun spoke up. "No prints at all on this thing."

Pop Albury looked interested.

"How you coming, Doc?" Ryan asked the coroner's assistant.

The doctor got up from his knees where he had been examining Emma's body.

"All done," he said. "You can take it away, now, boys. By the way, Pop, is this Andy of yours by any chance a midget?"

"He's taller than I am," Pop

said. "I'd say just about six feet; give or take an inch. Why do you ask."

"This woman was shot by a gun held below the level of the wound," the doctor replied. "The slugs ranged upward after entry. I can tell the angle after I do an autopsy, but they do angle up. Usually it's the other way round with anyone as slight as she is. A man would shoot down to her heart, particularly if he aimed at all."

"You sure?" Lieutenant Ryan asked.



The coroner's man put on his coat. "You know I know my job. I just thought I'd mention it seemed funny to me."

"Lieutenant," Pop said, "a lot of things seem funny to me. Here's another one. I heard whoever it was run out the back way. When he got downstairs the door was bolted. It wouldn't open, and I heard him pull the bolt. Now don't

you think a man who knew this place, and knew he might have to run for it, would have left the bolt off that door? Even Andy would be bright enough to leave the door open."

Simon spoke up then. "If it wasn't Andy, it was his twin I saw. Why don't you catch him and see what kind of alibi he has."

"We'll do just that," Ryan said.

Pop was still troubled. "You sound like you wanted it to be Andy," he told Simon. "Recollect now, you never did like him. Never liked anybody; now that I think of it. Not even your poor dead wife there that you don't seem sorry about at all."

"What do you mean by that, Pop?" Ryan was interested.

"He was always complaining about how tight she was with money and how mean she treated him. Leastwise he was whenever I would listen to him. He wanted her to put him in a private hospital or something."

He would have gone on, but Simon interrupted. Simon wasn't scared yet, but he was getting mad. He hated Pop. "You meddling old fool!" he said. "What are you trying to do? Sure I was mad at my wife sometimes. What husband ain't? But that isn't a motive for murder."

"I didn't say it was." Ryan said. Simon pushed his advantage. "Suppose I had a motive—what do you think I could do about it? Do

you think I could ever aim a gun or hold the aim for three shots? Do you?"

He sat there in the wheel chair and excitement made him shake even harder than ever. His hands trembled and his face twitched and his limbs jumped spasmodically. The sweat soaked his underwear singlet and the legs of his thin slacks. He was a pitiful figure, and he knew it. The more he tried to hold still, the harder he shook. Even the police hated to watch him.

Pop was obviously affected. He went to the bathroom and got a clean towel for Simon's neck. He took the old towel and was about to throw it away. Then he put it close to his face for a minute.

"Lieutenant," Pop said. "Smell this thing a minute."

Ryan took the wet and filthy rag and held it up to his nose. "Gun oil!!" he said. "So that's why there's no prints on the gun. But he couldn't have done the shooting. Those shakes are real. And whoever shot her knew his business. Three shots so close together. He never could have."

"Oh, yes he could," Pop insisted. "I see it all now. This towel did

more than wipe the gun. It held it steady while he fired. Look at the arm of that wheel chair. It slopes up a little to the front. Wrap a towel around the arm and the gun frame and the barrel will point up a little. The towel holds the gun. He just had to point the chair and fire as often as he wanted to."

"We can check it," Ryan said. "We can check the angle of the chair arm, the dead woman's height, and the angle of the wounds. There should be powder fragments where the towel was around the gun's cylinder, too."

"There will be," Simon shouted. "I hated her, and I killed her. I didn't think you could ever tell how. I hated her like I hate you."

"That's what went wrong," Pop Albury said. "You hated too much. If you hadn't tried to hurt Andy and accuse him, I might never have thought this thing through. You would have been able to get rid of the towel or wash it."

Simon shook and shook. He couldn't stop. "They'll never execute a sick man," he said.

"No, old man," Lieutenant Ryan said. "They won't execute you. They won't have to. I think your own hate did that long ago."



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CUT AND DRIED

*To know her love, he found,
was a thing apart. But to
know her name, he was
to discover, meant—death!*

by HAL ELLSON

THE PHONE rang on Captain Meza's desk. He picked up the instrument, listened and frowned. A matter of grave importance, but the caller refused to discuss the matter with anyone but the chief of police.

"Chief Lopez is busy," Meza explained. "I am handling all matters for him."

"Too bad," said the voice, "for both Lopez and yourself when the newspapers hear what I have to say."

"Please hold on. I'll see what I can do. What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say."

"But—"

"Captain, I am losing patience."

It was cool in the office, but when Chief Lopez put down the phone a film of perspiration bathed his face.

"Bad news?" said Detective Victor Fiala.

"An anonymous call. About a murder at the Diaz ranch." This explained the perspiration and the pallor on Lopez' face: he and Adolpho Diaz were the closest of friends.

"The one who called," Lopez continued, "claims a body is buried behind the Diaz ranchhouse."

"Serious business, if it happens to be true," Fiala said mildly. "Whose body is supposed to be buried there, and who did the burying?"

"The caller didn't say," Lopez answered.

A knock sounded on the door. It opened abruptly. Captain Meza stepped in. He had listened in on the call.

"Well," he said, staring at Lopez.

"I don't know," Lopez said, flushing violently. "A body buried behind the Diaz ranchhouse?"

"You think the call was a practical joke?"

"I don't know what to think." Lopez' eyes went to Fiala in an appeal for help, but Fiala could give none with Captain Meza smelling blood.

Besides, there was no way out but to verify the call.

Fiala shrugged. "The thing will have to be checked out."

Lopez merely nodded and looked up at Captain Meza. "You'll take care of the matter?"

"Personally." The captain's heels clicked together; his teeth

gleamed in a sudden tight unpleasant smile. Out of the office he hurried, his heels studding the tiled balcony in a rapid tattoo.

"The bloodhound is on the trail," Fiala remarked dryly, but Lopez did not smile and made no comment.

An hour and a half drive to the Diaz ranch, plus the same for the return drive, plus another hour to dig up the body and a brief investigation—four hours in all and Captain Meza arrived back in Montes.

While his men carried the dead man into the morgue, Meza ran up the balcony stairs and burst into Lopez' office. Sweat gleamed on his tanned face; his teeth shone in an icy smile.

"A cut and dried case," he said to Lopez.

"You found the body?" Lopez said with a look of pain on his face.

"The body of Justo Garcia." There was no need to be more explicit with Lopez and Fiala. Both men knew Garcia well for his conflicts with the law. "I arrested Adolpho Diaz for the murder of Justo Garcia."

"You solved the case very quickly," Fiala commented dryly.

"Yes, while you were sitting in that comfortable chair," Captain Meza replied. "Ah, but then you're not as young as you used to be, my friend."

"You have youth. I have something else, but that hardly makes us even. You say you arrested

Senor Diaz. He admitted killing Garcia?"

"Not yet, but he will."

"Even if you have to choke it out of him, hey, Captain?" said Fiala.

"That won't be necessary. We know that Diaz committed the murder."

"We?" Fiala snorted. "And just how do we know, Captain? What are the facts?"

Captain Meza smiled. "Yes, the facts, of course. A half-dozen people saw Garcia when he went to the ranch yesterday, and no one saw him return."

"Go on," said Fiala.

"At the ranch he and Diaz had a violent argument and Diaz threatened to shoot Garcia. That I had from the caretaker at the ranch. Diaz was shot in back of the head. Those are the facts."

Captain Meza shrugged, turned on his heels and left.

"My best friend," Chief Lopez groaned. "I don't understand."

"What don't you understand?" asked Fiala.

"Adolpho isn't the kind to use a gun. I know that. I can't believe he killed any one."

"What else don't you understand?"

Lopez left the question hanging, poured himself a drink, lit a cigarette, looked at Fiala and said, "What was Garcia doing at the ranch? Adolpho wouldn't spit on the likes of him."

"Maybe not," said Fiala. "But Garcia was murdered. It looks bad for Senor Diaz."

Suddenly Lopez ground out his cigarette and stood up. "Wait here, Victor. I'm going to see Adolpho."

Ten minutes passed and Lopez returned with his jaw thrust out.

"Adolpho's innocent," he declared. "He gave his word that he didn't kill Garcia and that's good enough for me."

"But not good enough to keep him out of prison."

"I know, I know." Lopez shook his head. "It looks very bad. He admits to threatening Garcia. Victor, you've got to help him. You'll see him now?"

"Of course." Fiala arose and went to the door.

"Captain Meza is ready to hang Adolpho," Lopez said after him.

Fiala looked back and grinned. "Don Quickshot would hang his own grandmother if he got the chance. But let's not worry about him."

The door closed softly. A half-minute later Captain Meza looked up from his desk with a sardonic grin on his face. "Ah, the great detective would like to question the prisoner, no doubt?"

"No doubt."

"A waste of time. We have our man."

In a world of uncertainties here was a voice that rang with true conviction. How rare and wonderful, but Fiala shrugged.

"CIGARETTE, Senior?" Adolpho Diaz sat on a rude stool in the headquarters' jail and Fiala stood over him. "Ah, you don't smoke? Well—" The detective lit up and dropped the match. "If you don't mind," he began. "A few questions."

"I've already answered enough questions with Captain Meza," he said tightly.

"Perhaps, but let's go over them. Better still, let's try some new ones."

Senor Diaz shrugged. "As you wish."

"Good," Fiala pinched out his cigarette. "Now concerning Senor Garcia. He came to your ranch yesterday?"

"Yes."

"For what reason?"

"He wanted money."

"For what?"

Diaz stared at the floor. "It had to do with a gambling debt. Unfortunately, I have a weakness for gambling. Two weeks ago I lost a large sum to a man named Vasquez. Perhaps you know him?"

"Too well," Fiala nodded. "But if you lost money to him, what did Garcia have to do with it?"

"He came to collect it for Vasquez. I refused to pay him because I'd been cheated— A fact I made known to Garcia. He wasn't impressed. He'd been sent to collect, so he threatened me."

"And you did what?"

"Told him I'd blow his brains

out, which wasn't necessary. He left in a hurry."

"At what time?"

"It had just gotten dark."

"You remained at the ranch?"

"No. I left about a half-hour later and returned at four in the morning."

"And between those hours where were you?"

Diaz looked up and shook his head. "That's something I can't divulge."

"Your whole future may depend on that information," warned Fiala.

"A fact I'm aware of, but someone else would be endangered."

Probably an affair with a married woman, Fiala thought, and shook his head. "Too bad, Senor. Well, I must be going."

Captain Meza sat back in his chair and grinned up at Fiala as he came into the room. "So you questioned the prisoner, eh? No doubt he told you he's innocent."

"He expressed that point of view," Fiala said calmly.

"And your point of view, Victor? Would you say he's innocent?"

"Let's say I think he may be. Certainly, there isn't enough evidence to call him guilty."

Captain Meza smiled, leaned forward, pulled open a drawer of his desk and placed a pistol on the blotter. "Property of Senor Diaz—and found in Garcia's grave. Now do you still think Diaz is innocent?"

Taken back, but not completely,

Fiala replied, "If you're trying to embarrass me, you haven't succeeded. As for the pistol, while it appears damaging, it doesn't prove anything."

"Nor does all the other evidence, I suppose. What more do you want, Victor? It's all there, cut and dried."

"Which is just the trouble," said Fiala, turning to the door without further explanation.

Chief Lopez looked up anxiously as his office door opened and Fiala walked in. "Well, Victor?"

"It looks bad for Señor Diaz. And yet things are not as bad as they look."

"Meaning what?"

"Meza thinks it's all cut and dried. That's exactly the trouble. The whole package is too neat. That may be acceptable to the captain, who jumps to conclusions. As for us, if we don't jump—" Fiala paused and glanced at his watch. "Getting late. Explanations won't undo anything, but take the anonymous call. The fellow refused to identify himself. Inconsequential? Perhaps, and perhaps not. More to the point, he must have witnessed the murder and been at the ranch to know where the body was buried."

"So?" Lopez said, not following the thread.

"The caretaker also was at the ranch."

"According to Captain Meza."

"But he didn't make the call."

"We don't know whether he did or not."

"We'll assume that he didn't."

"How can we assume anything, Victor?"

"There's no phone at the ranch, none in Guadelupe. What's more, I doubt if any one in the area, much less the caretaker, would know how to use a phone."

"That's possible," Lopez admitted. "But I still don't see what you're driving at."

"The point is, if the caretaker didn't make the call, then someone else did, which means another person was at the ranch. Yet the caretaker mentioned no one else."

"I'm afraid I still don't follow you."

About to continue, Fiala stopped himself, looked at his watch again and moved to the door. "You'll excuse me. Theory isn't enough. And when one waits too long—"

"I understand, Victor," Lopez said, reaching for the bottle on his desk.

GUADELUPE DOZED in the sun, a primitive place of adobe and thatch, chickens and goats, a small village with dusty streets pounded by sleepy oxen and rutted by ponderous wheels. A village not dreaming of the past, but the past itself, lost in time, buried in inertia, innocent of violence and crime.

But now— Fiala shook his head. The climate of change. Ah, poor Guadelupe, he thought, slowing his

car for a-rooster crossing the road.

Adobes with thatched roofs, shadowed doorways, flowers blooming in the road and no one in sight. A bird called, then was still. A short way into the desert Fiala braked his car at the Diaz ranch. The white ranchhouse deserted-looking and silent, a few ancient mesquite crowding the well, all else naked and harsh in the burning sun.

He touched the horn. The sound died in the stillness; no one responded.

Once more the horn. This time he waited longer. The caretaker appeared from back of the ranchhouse, not old but ancient and withered by the sun, with skin of leather, a small man made smaller still by a huge and tattered charro hat.

As the old man approached the car, Fiala stepped from it and greeted him, then introduced himself.

"Senor Diaz is in serious trouble," he went on. "Perhaps you can help him."

The old man barely nodded. Had he heard? Was he asleep on his feet, dreaming through slitted eyes. A waste of time to question him? Perhaps, but the questions had to be asked.

"Yesterday," Fiala began, "a man named Garcia came here. He had an argument with Senor Diaz?"

"Yes, Senor."

"A very violent argument?"

"Yes, there was much shouting."

"Did Senor Diaz threaten to shoot Garcia?"

"Yes."

"And did he shoot him?"

The old man squinted toward the desert.

"Why should he shoot him?" he asked. "The fellow left."

"When did he leave?"

"When the sky was getting dark."

"Interesting," said Fiala, "but why didn't you tell that to Captain Meza?"

The old man shrugged. "Tell him? He didn't ask."

Fiala smiled to himself. "All right. Garcia left the ranch. When did he return?"

"He didn't, Senor."

"You mean you didn't see him return? Is that it?"

"I didn't."

"But he did come back. He was murdered and buried in back of the house."

The old man shrugged. "He was found under the ground. How he got there I don't know."

"Then you weren't here the whole night?" Fiala said, puzzled.

"I was here. I am always here."

"And Senor Diaz?"

"He left when it grew dark. It was very late when he came back, almost morning."

"He returned alone?"

"Yes, Senor."

"Do you know where he went?"

"To see a lady friend. That is all I know about that. Every Friday night he comes back late."

Victor Fiala nodded. "Then you heard no pistol shot last night?"

"No, Senor. I heard nothing but the coyotes across the valley."

"Do you know that Senor Diaz' pistol was bound buried with Senor Garcia?" Fiala said.

The old man shrugged again. "If Senor Diaz' gun was found in the grave, does that mean he shot Garcia?"

Fiala shook his head and got back in his car. An hour later he drove into Montes with the taste of grit and dust in his mouth. A cold bottle of Carta Blanca would do, but Lopez awaited him. Five minutes later he mounted the balcony stairway at headquarters, an agonizing climb.

Short of breath, he entered the chief's office. Lopez raised his head from the desk. "Well, Victor?"

Victor Fiala wiped his forehead and said, "I believe Senor Diaz is innocent."

"That's all you came back with? Your belief?"

"For the time being," Fiala said quietly, "that should be sufficient."

"Not for the judge. Didn't you find anything? Were you looking for clues at the Black Cat in the bottom of a glass of tequila?"

"I'm afraid I had no time for the Black Cat, and I am very thirsty. It's a long drive to the Diaz ranch."

"You found something there?" Lopez said anxiously.

"The usual flaws in Captain Meza's methods. Ah, that hothead. He's too quick, a dangerous man, efficiently sloppy."

"Never mind that fool. What happened at the ranch, Victor?"

Fiala rubbed the side of his nose. "It's not very clear yet, but Captain Meza didn't obtain all the facts; consequently he didn't find the right answers. According to him, Garcia didn't leave the ranch —a cock-eyed theory based on reports gathered from those who saw him arrive in Guadelupe and failed to see him leave.

"Well, it was dark when he left. That's why he wasn't seen. But Diaz' caretaker saw him leave the ranch as darkness fell. He didn't return till almost dawn. Now if only this much is true, Diaz couldn't have murdered Garcia."

"But how do you explain the body at the ranch?"

"Another party was responsible for that. That person killed Garcia and buried him."

"But who is that person?"

"The man who made the anonymous phone call."

Lopez frowned. "That doesn't make sense, does it, Victor?"

"To my mind, it does. The caller knew of the murder. That is taken for granted, or he wouldn't have phoned—but he refused to give his name—and for good reason: he'd implicate himself," Fiala said and

arose from his chair. "Getting late. I've a few items to check that aren't clear. As soon as I clarify them, the sooner we'll have our man."

Five minutes later Fiala met with the coroner, questioned him in regard to the murdered Garcia and drove off in his car. His first stop was a bar of bad reputation. Five more stops at similar establishments were necessary before he obtained the information he sought. At still another bar he picked up Antonio Vasquez and arrested him for the murder of Justo Garcia.

At headquarters, Captain Meza laughed.

"Ridiculous," he said to Fiala. "We've already got the killer."

"No," said Fiala, "this is our man. Here is what happened. Senor Vasquez cheated Senor Diaz at cards and when Diaz refused to pay, He sent Garcia after him to collect, but Garcia failed his mission and reported back to Vasquez. A violent argument followed during which Vasquez killed Garcia. Then, to cover his tracks and avenge himself on Diaz, Vasquez brought Garcia's corpse to the ranch and buried it there—along with Senor Diaz' pistol, which he took from the ranchhouse while the caretaker nodded."

"A wild theory," Captain Meza said angrily. "Where is the proof?"

"The proof?" Fiala smiled. "The coroner put the time of death at midnight. Between the hours of nine and eleven Garcia was seen in

two bars. In one he argued with Vasquez and left. Vasquez followed him out, disposed of him and brought his body to the ranch."

Fiala paused and looked at Captain Meza with pity. "As for Senor Diaz, if you still believe he is guilty, let me inform you, he wasn't at the ranch last evening. He was with a lady friend whose name won't be mentioned unless—"

Here Fiala turned on Vasquez. "Unless you wish to divulge it. You know the lady, of course, and you knew Senor Diaz would be with her last night."

Vasquez dropped his eyes, then raised them and said, "It is better not to mention the name of the lady, but that was another reason I had for avenging myself on Senor Diaz."

"All right, take him downstairs," Lopez said, nodding to Captain Meza and, as the door closed after Vasquez and his keeper, he turned to Fiala.

"Just one question,, Victor," he said. "How did you know the name of the lady and that Vasquez was concerned with her?"

"The name of the lady?" Fiala smiled and shook his head. "I didn't know it. However, Vasquez assumed I did and hanged himself."

Lopez laughed and said, "Now that it's over, may I assume that you're going to the Black Cat?"

"A correct assumption," Victor Fiala answered, heading slowly for the door.

(Continued from other side)

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